

The Peace Process in Sri Lanka and the Role of Civil Society

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The ongoing peace process and what type of peace work civil society actors engage in, the obstacles to the creation of a people's movement to peace in Sri Lanka, and some challenges to civil society in the current peace process are discussed here. We have since three years back a ceasefire agreement, which was planned to put a stop to the violence, which means an improved situation for the war weary people in Sri Lanka. We have to realize that a large amount of patience is needed in this difficult process.

The importance of having a third party keeping up the dialogue between the parties, and investigating accusations of violations of the ceasefire agreement cannot be underestimated in a conflict where mistrust has throughout the years grown strong between the involved parties.

Since the late 22 years, organizations for peace have been expressing ideas that were not commonly accepted: they have stressed the need for a negotiated, political settlement, and the futility of the military strategy. People have organized around narrow ethnic identities, and mobilized around prejudice, hatred or fear against the ethnic other. At the moment, popular support for the peace process is strong. Very few people would like to go back to the war situation. But as the peace process has made serious difficulties, or come to a standstill, people get increasingly frustrated. The ongoing peace process is a top level one. There is thus an urgent need to get the peace issue on the agenda of people and for people to receive correct information about what is going on and why.

As obstacles we can list difficulty to being mobilised, ethnically division of civil society, vague definition of peace, being Colombo based and dependency on foreign funding. Challenges for Civil Society in the Peace Process are: to continue voicing people's support, to continue awareness raising about the background to the conflict, to show that there are other voices to be heard and to build bridges among the north, East and south of Sri Lanka .

Key Words: Civil Society, Peace process, Awareness, Political settlement

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