

SRI LANKA COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

29 November 2008

JOINT STATEMENT¹

Following an extensive series of discussions sponsored by La Trobe University's Centre for Dialogue over a period of twelve months, participants drawn from the various Sri Lankan communities resident in Melbourne agreed to the following statement.

This statement, it should be stressed, is not offered as a solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka. Participants in the dialogue continue to hold different views about different aspects of the conflict.

Nonetheless, participants agree that the dialogue in which they have engaged has served a useful purpose, enabling a free exchange of views and a better understanding of each other's positions. They believe that further dialogue both among the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Australia and in other countries is a positive step and should be actively promoted.

The participants also agree that:

1. The long-term objective is to restore peace in Sri Lanka and to foster a society that nurtures a culture of peace based on mutual respect, mutual understanding and cooperation – this would immensely improve relations between the Sri Lankan communities in Australia.
2. A just and durable solution to the Sri Lankan conflict requires each community to develop greater understanding of and support for the legitimate rights, needs and aspirations of all communities.
3. A just and durable solution also requires:
 - a) respect for the human rights of all the citizens and communities in Sri Lanka, including all the rights outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;²

¹ This statement was discussed and unanimously approved by members of Melbourne's Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher communities at the 6th and final Sri Lanka Community Dialogue session on 29th November 2008.

² Sri Lanka acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in June 1980 and to the first Optional Protocol in October 1997.

- b) serious, transparent and free discussion involving all the communities about future political reforms, including the possibility of future constitutional change – the overriding aim of such reforms must be to promote good governance and the legitimate interests and security of all citizens and communities in Sri Lanka.
4. Even before peace has been restored, all parties have a responsibility to:
- bring to an end all attacks on civilians;³
 - meet basic humanitarian needs of civilians and to protect them from the effects of the fighting – where appropriate accredited international agencies should be invited to assist in the provision of such services;⁴
 - ensure that any use of force is conducted in strict accordance with international law.
5. Constructive dialogue within and between Sri Lankan diaspora communities around the world can make a vital contribution to the healing of wounds and reconciliation, and help create a more favourable environment for a durable peace.
6. More specifically, such dialogue can:
- encourage truth and objectivity in the reporting of events and responses to them;
 - promote use of language likely to foster mutual trust and understanding;
 - strengthen forward-looking, constructive leadership that is prepared to take risks in the interests of peace;
 - take small, practical steps towards greater collaboration, including joint educational and social activities;
 - enable new opportunities for inter-communal dialogue in Australia and beyond.

For further information contact:

Project Coordinator: Dr Michális S. Michael (m.michael@latrobe.edu.au), tel. (03) 9479-2140, fax. (03) 9479 1997, Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University, Victoria 3086, Australia.

³ As defined by the International Red Cross or the Geneva Conventions.

⁴ In line with the Guiding Principles for Humanitarian and Development Assistance agreed by donor countries and the Sri Lankan government in 2007.