



June 2016

Issue 01

### SAPRI's Mandate

The South Asia Policy and Research Institute is a not for profit, non-partisan 'Think Tank' focusing on issues common to South Asia.

#### Key focus areas:

- Good Governance
- Conflict Transformation & Peace Building
- Economic Development & Poverty Alleviation
- Empowerment of Women
- Environment Protection & Climate Change
- Cultural Heritage
- Regional Economic Cooperation
- South Asia in a multi polar world

#### NEWS

#### Project updates...

#### May 2016

Buddhists and Christians in Embilipitiya jointly celebrated Vesak with Embilipitiya Religious Harmony Coordinating Committee (RHCC) of SAPRI organizing a Vesak Lantern competition for children at Sri Sangarama Viharaya. The winner was a Buddhist child while two Catholic children won the second and third places.

#### May 2016

People from diverse religions in Beruwela initiated a joint relief effort to help flood victims, under the Beruwela RHCC of SAPRI.

#### April 2016

Different religious communities in Galle had a joint Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebration organized by the Galle RHCC of SAPRI.

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### Message from Chair SAPRI



I take great pleasure in releasing this message on the occasion of the first issue of "Aloka News", the news bulletin of SAPRI.

In February 2010, SAPRI was created as an Institute to formulate policy related to political, economic and social issues in the region through research and conduct an advocacy process of those policies. SAPRI has grown in the past six years, from focusing only on research of publications and engaging in activities in the South Asia region with 'thinkers' and policy makers, to planning concerted activities in the countries of the region on common issues while conducting programs to create awareness at the grassroots level.

I am pleased that SAPRI stands proud as a think tank and is often invited within the country and outside to engage in diverse activities. I take this occasion to thank the SAPRI Board of Directors and the International Advisory Council and the Academic Advisory Council of SAPRI for their guidance; the donor agencies for their support to projects; and well-wishers and all who have contributed to SAPRI's endeavors, for their goodwill and continued assistance. I wish "Aloka News" every success.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga  
Chair, SAPRI

**December 2015**

SAPRI's RHCC in Imbulpe conducted a greetings card drawing competition and an essay competition related to Christmas, with children of all religions participating.

### Major Events

- **“Policy Making & Reform” , December 2015, Colombo**  
Lecture by Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia. Former Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission of India
- **The Many Faces of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1591-1765: Lessons for our Time?**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014, Colombo**, lecture by Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, Princeton University
- **Colloquium on “Challenges to Pluralism in South Asia,” , January 2014, Colombo**  
The speakers were Prof. Rajeev Bhargava (India), Prof. Radhika Coomaraswamy (Sri Lanka), Dr. Christophe Jaffrelot (France), Ms. Asma Jahangir (Bangladesh) and Dr. Clem McCartney (Club de Madrid). Prof. Savithri Goonesekere and Dr. Deepika Udagama moderated.
- **Round table discussion on “Strengthening Responses to Climate Variability in South Asia.” July, 2013, Kathmandu,**  
Ambassador Geetha de Silva of SAPRI made the keynote speech.
- **Seminar on “Making Sustainability the Next Metric: The Post 2015 Development Agenda: South Asia Consultation”, November 2013, Colombo.**  
Seminar was in partnership with Centre for Poverty Analysis, Club de Madrid and others. SAPRI Chair President Chandrika Kumaratunga chaired the session on “Shared Societies & Governance”.
- **“Prospects for Middle Income Sri Lanka: Challenges & Opportunities”**  
**July 2013, Colombo**, Lecture by Dr. Indrajith Coomaraswamy, former Director, Economic Affairs, Commonwealth Secretariat
- **Roundtable Discussion on Inclusive Development & Growth, August 2012, Colombo**  
Lord Meghnad Desai, former Director of Studies, London School of Economics; Dr. Shankar Acharya, former Chief Economic Adviser, India and Dr. Kamal Hossain, former Minister of Law and Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, participated. Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy moderated.
- **SAPRI Inaugural Conference on ‘Inclusive Development’, April 2012, New Delhi**  
Two day conference co-hosted with the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) in New Delhi and Club de Madrid. Former Presidents HE Andrés Pastrana Arango of Colombia, HE Cassam Uteem of Mauritius, HE Luis Alberto Lacalle of Uruguay and HE Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka, Senior policy makers and academics including Prof. Pratap Bhanu Mehta of CPR participated.
- **“Be The Change” Seminar on Social Business, December 2011, Colombo**  
The keynote speaker was Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus.

## Recommendations for “Building Religious Harmony” launched in Colombo



At a multi-religious ceremony held at Sri Lanka Foundation in Colombo, SAPRI launched a publication containing recommendations for “Building Religious Harmony”.

The event brought together on one platform, Buddhist, Hindu, Islam, Catholic/Christian religious leaders, who spoke on the commonalities in the teachings of the four religions as well as the harmony that prevailed among diverse ethnic and religious communities in Sri Lanka for centuries. The event which took place in January 2014 was attended by the clergy and members of different religious and ethnic communities, political leaders, the diplomatic community, professionals, academics, the civil society and the media, among others. The recommendations were the outcome of an intense dialogue conducted for over six months by the Forum For Interfaith and Dialogue( FIFaD) of SAPRI whose members were senior clergy from the four main religions, eminent academics, legal experts and the civil society.

### Building Unity at Grassroots in Imbulpe, Gampaha and Kurunegala

A program for building Religious Harmony at grassroots’ level was initiated by SAPRI, with UNDP assistance, in the districts of Imbulpe, Gampaha and Kurunegala, identified as potential religious ‘hot spots’. The objective of the project conducted in 2014-2015 was to address the topic of religious harmony with the direct involvement of different stakeholders from the four main religions in the country. The target groups were religious leaders, community leaders and multi stakeholders. The latter two categories included a high percentage of women while the overall program had a considerable presence of youth. Capacity building workshops held for the different groups focused on attitude and mind-set change through interactive sessions and group activity among other methods used. On the conclusion of the program two platforms were created, one of religious leaders and the other comprising community leaders and multi-stake holders. Working Committees set up in the districts assisted SAPRI for program implementation and became the driving mechanisms of the process after SAPRI’s program ended. Major expectations from the platforms are, to intervene in case of religious disturbances; watch for early warning signs of religious tensions; take action to diffuse any adverse situation, and, design and implement Religious Harmony activities.



## **SAPRI promotes women in politics in Sri Lanka**

SAPRI and International Alert joined together to explore the obstacles to women's participation in politics, and, to seek from women political leaders and activists, both at national and grassroots level, recommendations to overcome the challenges through a well devised plan of action. For this purpose, two workshops on "Women and Politics in Sri Lanka: Challenges to Meaningful Participation" were held in November 2013 & March 2014 in Colombo. Chair/SAPRI President Chandrika Kumaratunga made the keynote address. The other speakers at the workshops were MP's Sudharshani Fernandopulle, Anoma Gamage, Wasantha Senanayake Harin Fernando, Niroshan Perera and Hunais Farook.



Women political leaders and activists from across the country representing all ethnic communities, experts, civil society members, academics and youth groups also contributed to the workshops. The recommendations that emerged from the two workshops were published in a document as "Increasing Women's Participation in Political Institutions in Sri Lanka". Following the success of the workshops, a widely attended seminar on "Celebrating Women: Towards an Inclusive Political Culture", was held in March 2015 at the BMICH Colombo, to coincide with the International Women's Day.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga was the Chief Guest and delivered a thought provoking keynote address. UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Subinay Nandy, MP's Rosy Senanayake, Sudarshini Fernandopulle and Anoma Gamage also spoke on this occasion. The follow up activities were Roundtable Discussions on "Increasing women's representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka", with the Civil Society in March 2015 and the Diplomatic community in May 2015 respectively. Moving to the grassroots, a two day workshop on the theme "Promoting Women in Politics in Sri Lanka," was conducted in January 2015, in Embilipitiya, as a pilot project, targeting women political activists there.

### **SAPRI welcomes the allocation of 25% of Local Government Councils' seats to women**

SAPRI welcomes the allocation of 25% of Local Government Council membership to women by the landmark "Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2016", adopted by the Parliament of Sri Lanka in February 2016. This is a major breakthrough in empowering women and securing their participation in decision and policy making. SAPRI believes this would be a starting point in a more progressive move towards higher representation by women who comprise a little over 50% of the country's population.

### **SAPRI embarks on program towards religious freedom of all Sri Lankans**

In a bid to protect the religious freedom of all Sri Lankans through a process of building religious harmony, SAPRI launched a program in five districts, i.e., Kalutara, Galle, Ratnapura, Kegalle and Puttalam, in 2015/16, reaching out to the grassroots level. The program was supported by the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI).

Three components were targeted, namely, the Buddhist clergy, political leaders & political activists and community leaders & multi stakeholders. SAPRI successfully completed 27 capacity building and Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops during the project period.



The intra-faith workshops of the Buddhist clergy brought out positive suggestions for creating harmony. The political leaders participating in the project commended SAPRI for the initiative of bringing such events to their “door steps” and pledged to continue with the work. The continuous and informal nature of the project encouraged participants at all activities and secured attendance on a regular basis. The project succeeded in raising awareness and setting up platforms in the five project districts. As a result, four Buddhist clergy platforms, three community leaders’ and multi-stakeholders’ platforms and two political leaders’ & political activists’ platforms emerged from the project. Coordinating committees were elected to lead the future activities based upon roadmaps prepared during the workshops. The platforms will act as bedrocks for future initiatives in the target districts.



## **SAPRI Chair President Kumaratunga speaks on the *New Commitment for Peace in Sri Lanka* at the United Nations in New York**



Speaking on the topic “*In a World of Risks: A New Commitment for Peace*”, at the High Level Thematic Debate on “UN, Peace and Security”, at the UN Headquarters on 10 May 2016, President Kumaratunga offered Sri Lanka as a beacon of hope to the world as the international community faced one of its most complex challenges of peace and security.

“Sri Lanka” she said, “has been able to emerge from a dark period of conflict. Since January 2015, a new President and a national unity government has been elected, committed to democratic values, and to moving forward as an engaged member of the world community”. President Kumaratunga further said, “...we have already started taking steps aimed at achieving meaningful reconciliation, strengthening democratic institutions, good governance, the restoration of the rule of law, political power sharing and confidence building among communities affected by conflict for many years. We have renewed our commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment”.

(Full speech at ..... <http://www.slmission.com/index.php/news/91-latest/870-former-president-chandrika-kumaratunga-chairperson-of-the-office-for-national-unity-and-reconciliation-addresses-the-high-level-thematic-debate-on-un-peace-and-security>)

## **SAPRI participates in Regional and Global Activities**

**17 June 2016, Colombo-** At the invitation of the USA Embassy in Colombo, SAPRI attended a discussion with Will Cole and Anupma Jain (Gender and social inclusion specialist), representatives of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) of the USA. The discussion focused on issues regarding women’s status in Sri Lanka. Heads of leading think tanks in Colombo participated.

**24-29 April 2016, Harvard University, USA-** SAPRI contributed to the South and Central Asia Region program under the theme, “Relationship Building Across the Himalayas: Challenges and Opportunities,” of the Near East and South Asia Centre for Strategic Studies of the National Defense University of the USA, hosted by the Harvard Kennedy School. Senior officials and experts from Central and South Asia participated.

**29 January, 2016 Canadian High Commission, Colombo-** SAPRI officials spoke at the panel discussion of the *Women Parliamentarian Dialogue- Sri Lanka and India* organized by the High Commission. Women Parliamentarians, think tanks, women activists and the civil society participated.

**11-12 June 2015, Sydney, Australia-** SAPRI participated in the *Regional Summit to Counter Violent Extremism: Challenging Terrorist Propaganda*, at the invitation of the Attorney General of Australia. Government representatives, academics, experts and the civil society participated.