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**SAPRI extends its Best Wishes to Friends and Well-wishers for
a Happy New Year**



SAPRI joins with World Food Program for Sustainable Development Goal 2: End Hunger and Improve Nutrition through Sustainable Agriculture

South Asia Policy & Research Institute (SAPRI) joined hands with World Food Programme, to launch a National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition leading to Zero Hunger, on 28th September 2016. The event took place at the BMICH, with former President Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chair, SAPRI as the Lead Convener of the Review Process. The initiative is

in line with the second of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which refers to the elimination of hunger and improvement of nutrition through the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

The Review Process, which aims to study the country's status of food security and nutrition as well as agriculture, is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the key challenges and policy gaps. The review process is expected to involve the governmental sector as well as the non-governmental sector, including experts and academics, civil society representatives, entrepreneurs and UN Agencies to propose actionable areas where the partners could assist the country to achieve its goals on nullifying food and malnutrition related concerns.

Delivering the keynote speech at the Inauguration of the Strategic Review Process Leading to Zero Hunger in Sri Lanka, Madam Chandrika Kumaratunga stated that deaths resulted by hunger are not reported in Sri Lanka at present. "However, 10% of the Sri Lankan population remains undernourished, while 20% of the figure comprises children under 5 years. The lack of awareness among citizens on proper nutrition is a pressing issue. Even educated individuals seem to lack adequate knowledge concerning good nutrition".

"The Ministry of Health is currently conducting several programs to raise awareness about nutrition in order to improve the health of the population, especially to avoid developing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). What Sri Lanka needs as a country is better policies and better organization to implement those policies" emphasized Madam Kumaratunga.

Ms. Una McCauley, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, focused on the global scale importance of sustainable development goals, of which, achieving zero hunger is a prime goal. “Though Sustainable Development Goals are referred to as UN goals they are equally global goals and our goals in Sri Lanka as well”.



Sri Lanka’s status as a developing country achieving food security and marching towards sustainable development was the centre of praise expressed by Susana Rico, Acting Country Director in Sri Lanka for the World Food Programme. “Sri Lanka has outperformed many countries in achieving Millennium Development Goals in terms of poverty reduction, health and environment sustainability and has made tremendous strides in reducing poverty” Ms. Rico pointed out.

The speech by Dr. Rohan Wijekoon, Director General, Agriculture of the Ministry of Agriculture hinted of novel initiatives to combat hunger and malnutrition through innovative thinking. “Department of Agriculture has initiated a programme to promote ‘Edible Landscaping’, where landscaping plans are developed with consultations from architects with Department of Agriculture producing the plants and seeds free of charge. In addition, plans are underway to cultivate crops continuously by taking such cultivations beyond their traditional farming lands to other territories, which is titled *a White Revolution*.”

Dr. Palitha Mahipala- Director General, Health, of the Ministry of Health stated that the concept of health is not measured merely by the absence of diseases, but as a condition of physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. It is important to note that health cannot be viewed independent of general development. That is why it is incorporated into the UN general development agenda.

The launch of the Strategic Review was graced by an eminent gathering comprising Secretaries to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Rural Economic Affairs, Governor of the Western Province, Ambassadors and diplomatic representatives, former Ambassadors, the academia, the private sector, the civil society, Women’s organizations and the Youth.

Following the inauguration, mechanisms at the national, provincial and district levels were set up to give guidance and feed into the review process. A Multi-stakeholder Forum comprising government line Ministries; Provincial Council Secretariats and District Secretariats; and non-governmental sectors; met soon after the inauguration of the Strategic Review, discussed the methodology for conducting the Review and selected an Action Group to carry out a regular interaction with the Research/Analysis Team conducting the review of the programme. The Action Group has met on a number of occasions. It comprises several categories, as, Ministries that have a link to the Zero Hunger programme; experts and academics; the private sector; the civil society, NGO’s, women and youth; and UN Agencies. The respective categories form Pillars and carry out initiatives within each Pillar in order to provide information to the research team. The findings of the Strategic Review and recommendations for Zero Hunger are expected to be handed over to the Government of Sri Lanka at the highest level towards mid-February.

Inter-faith Dialogue in Puttalam Leading to Religious Harmony

Following a series of capacity building workshops that SAPRI conducted in Puttalam at the grassroots level, leading to Religious Harmony, the SAPRI team was pleased to be in Puttalam again on 10th September 2016 for an activity initiated and organized by the Divisional Coordinating Committee to promote harmony. The event held at Bodhirukkharama Temple in Puttalam, saw the participation of Buddhist clergy, and, Islamic clergy and representatives, in an effort to share basic concepts of religions with the Buddhist Dhamma School students of the temple Sunday School.

It was encouraging to see the efforts of religious and community leaders, such as Ven. Anamaduwe Medhananda Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Bodhirukkharama Temple in Kalpitiya, Ven. Bovita Dammissara of the Buddhist Centre in Puttalam, Moulavi Sabreen of the Grand Mosque, Puttalam, as well as Mr. K. T Haroon, Vice Principal of St. Andrews Maha Vidyalaya, Puttalam, taking the initiative. Ven. Kalupahane Piyananda Thero moderated the session. Mr A.A. Jayasena, a local entrepreneur and philanthropist provided logistical support.

Commencing the dialogue, Director SAPRI, Geetha de Silva extended greetings and good wishes of Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chair, SAPRI to the participants and conveyed Madam Kumaratunga's appreciation of the efforts of the Kalpitiya Coordinating Committee in driving forward the interfaith dialogue introduced to Kalpitiya by SAPRI.

Ven. Anamaduwe Medhananda Thero, describing the importance of the programme, highlighted the necessity of being a practitioner of the religion. *"It is important to identify yourself with a religion as a practitioner, rather than having inherited it by birth"*. Addressing the gathering, Moulavi Sabreen drew attention to the peaceful atmosphere that prevails in Puttalam, without ethnic or religious unrest. *"We live in complete harmony. His holiness Muhammad Nabi preached the value of harmony a millennia ago, which we respect and preserve up to date"*.

The program highlighted the interest of the students and teachers of the Sunday school to gain an insight into other religions and cultures, as they were seen making eager inquiries about Islamic philosophy, its history and rituals. A range of questions from, how Muslims conduct their prayers; to the difference between a sin and merit from an Islamic perspective; the significance of the fasting period; were aired during the session, to which, the Islamic representatives responded with clarity. The effort was fruitful, as the Moulavi invited the students of the Buddhist Dhamma School to visit and the Grand Mosque in Puttalam, to share their experience with Islamic students.

The leaders expressed their interest to conduct similar programs in other venues of religious worship in the area, to educate children on the values of co-existence. The Buddhist clergy expressed agreement to a proposal made by the Islamic clergy that teaching different languages to the students in the areas, such as Tamil to the Sinhala children and Sinhala to the Tamil and Muslim children, would facilitate closer communication among the children and contribute to harmony. In a community such as Puttalam which has an ethnically diverse population such a move would be particularly productive.

The event was organized as a part of the Religious Harmony Program initiated by SAPRI. The program aims to promote inter-faith dialogue and ethno-religious harmony amongst different religious groups and ethnicities that co-habit in a number of Divisions in the country.



Remembering Aluthgama 2014: Equality, Social Justice and a New Constitutional Order

It was a significant moment for the South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI) to participate in the Panel Discussion on “Remembering Aluthgama 2014: Equality, Social Justice and a new Constitutional Order”, in August 2016, to mark the second anniversary of the anti-Muslim violence in June 2014, in and around Aluthgama. It is these incidents of religious violence and hate speech as seen culminating with the Aluthgama incidents that urged SAPRI to commence an interfaith dialogue in an effort to Build Religious Harmony in the country, with the first capacity building session taking place in Attanagalla in the Gampaha District on August 2nd 2014.

The Law & Society Trust (LST), together with the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR), led the Panel Discussion on “Remembering Aluthgama 2014”. The Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) hosted the event. Former President of Sri Lanka, Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was the Chief Guest on the occasion.



The Panel Discussion was conducted by reflecting on the local and national ramifications of religious intolerance and the significance of constitutional reforms and transitional justice processes as a solution. The Discussion referred to the series of events that led to the culmination of a Sinhala -Muslim ethnic unrest in Aluthgama, and reviewed its socio-political aftermath. The first panel comprising Dr. Farzana Haniffa, from the University of Colombo; Ms. Darisha Bastians, Journalist and Mr. A.R.M. Badiuddeen from Aluthgama, focused on the conflict areas, highlighting the aspects that need addressing and placing them in relation to wider claims for justice, equality and inclusivity.

Building on this, the second panel with Prof. Savitri Goonesekere former Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, Dr. Harini Amarasuriya of the Open University of Sri Lanka and Ms. Wije Nagaraj as panelists, reflected on some of the challenges and prospects in relation to the realization of justice, minority rights and formal and substantive equality through the current constitutional reforms and transitional justice processes.

The Panel Discussion, not only had contributions of prominent academics, media representatives, the civil society and minority community leaders but also, politicians, diplomats as well as legal personalities, who voiced their opinion regarding the Aluthgama incidents and their aftermath.

Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, made the keynote speech on this occasion in the capacity of Chair, ONUR. Addressing the gathering, Madam Kumaratunga emphasized the importance of initiating a social change to address religious and ethnic tensions. “We need to change the hearts and minds of people. It is necessary to make people accept the necessity to live in harmony with each other, by celebrating and accepting diversity rather than rejecting it. Sri Lanka has so far failed to achieve harmony because the leaders were afraid to speak to the people on the need for harmony for a better society”. Madam Kumaratunga said.

The unrest between Sinhala and Muslim factions in Aluthgama took place in June 2014, which resulted in several deaths and destruction of property belonging to both Muslim and Sinhala communities.

The occasion of the panel discussion also provided the opportunity for the formal launching of the publication, “*Where have all the neighbours gone? Aluthgama Riots and its aftermath: A Fact Finding Mission to Aluthgama, Dharga Town, Velipanna and Beruwela*”, an initiative of the Law & Society Trust.

SAPRI in discussion with Senator Mobina Jaffer of Canada



Canadian High Commissioner Shelley Whiting hosted the South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI) and the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) to a meeting with Senator Mobina Jaffer of Canada, who was on a visit to Sri Lanka in mid November 2016. Director General ONUR, Mr. M.S. Jayasinghe, Ambassador C.D. Casie Chetty and Ms. Salma Yusuf represented ONUR while Ambassador Geetha de Silva represented SAPRI. Also present on this occasion was Ms. Jennifer Hart, Political & Trade Counsellor of the High Commission.

Ambassador de Silva briefed the Senator on the Interfaith Dialogue it is conducting at the grassroots level in an effort to build religious and

social harmony in a number of districts in the country. Responding to a question by the Senator about the level of interest of the participants and their commitment to continue with the programme, it was mentioned that the interest level was very high and the participants themselves formed Coordinating Committees and prepared Road Maps for the next step of the programme. It was gratifying to observe the divisional level activities the participants of the interfaith dialogue are conducting, very often with the attendance of students from the different religions. Senator Jaffer expressed the view that such initiatives would make a positive contribution to the reconciliation programme currently taking place in the country.

Regarding its *Empowerment of Women* programme, SAPRI provided details of the project “Promoting Women in Politics in Sri Lanka”. Women, by gaining an entry into positions in elected institutions of the country can contribute to “peace and security”, (UNSC Resolution 1325: *Women, peace and security*) which is vitally important in the current context of the country’s reconciliation work. However, the necessity of capacity building for aspiring women politicians was emphasized in order that they could conduct themselves in an effective manner when they are elected to high office. As the Senator expressed an interest in knowing the response of women participants to capacity building exercises, the pilot project conducted in Embilipitiya was brought to her attention (Aloka News Issue 01). Besides Interfaith dialogue and Women, the discussion focused on Reconciliation, Social harmony, Pluralism and Diversity.

Senator Mobina Jaffer represents the province of British Columbia in the Senate of Canada. Appointed to the Senate on June 13, 2001, she is the first Muslim senator, the first African-born senator, and the first senator of South Asian descent. Senator Jaffer is Deputy-Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. From 2002 to 2005, Senator Jaffer chaired the Canadian Committee on Women, Peace, and Security.

Puttalam feeds Ethnic Harmony with Buns: SAPRI in conversation with a philanthropist in Puttalam

It was at a multi-religious activity conducted under the patronage of the South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI) at the Sri Bodhirukkharamaya Temple in Puttalam that the SAPRI Team met with A.A. Jayasena, affectionately called “Bunis Mama” (Uncle who provides free buns), by the young and old in Puttalam. “Food is always known to hold a mysterious power to bring people together. What if a country

could utilize the power of food for national harmony?" asks Jayasena, speaking on the impact of one small step, towards a giant wave of change.

Jayasena, a soft spoken gentleman is the owner of 'Lihiniya Bakehouse' in Puttalam and well respected in the district. "I started the Bakehouse in 1980 in a little place, thatched with coconut leaves and worked tirelessly to build it, brick by brick, to the current status" he says. Yet, 36 years later, his sweat seems to have paid back well. His story is an influential one for aspiring businessmen.

However, it is not his rise to fame that draws attention towards this mild personality. It is his symbolic contribution to his surrounding that has a complex ethno-religious background. ***"As a child I suffered due to poverty. I know how it feels to be hungry. Therefore, in 2000, I started providing buns to students of Sunday Schools, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Catholic, in Puttalam. Now, on every Sunday, we dispatch a load of 7500 buns, by our own vehicles, to 68 Sunday Schools for children of all religions and ethnicities"***, Jayasena says. The task is not easy by any stretch of imagination. Preparing bakery items for 68 Sunday Schools, is a heavy financial burden on a small business such as Jayasena's. Nevertheless, once the idea came to him, he grasped it promptly although he knew the gravity of its implementation. ***"In our school days we were given mid-morning buns by the government. There is no such program nowadays, which made me want to do something about it"***. As providing buns to regular schools was beyond his capacity he decided to do something in a smaller way and settled for Sunday Schools, ensuring that their children, irrespective of religious differences received buns every Sunday. Although at the beginning his contribution was limited to a couple of schools, as his supply of buns increased he had to set up a dedicated bakery to keep the supply of buns intact. ***"My target is to increase the number of buns to 10,000"***, he says with a determined smile. However, his good intentions hardly stop there. ***"When I see that a child cannot afford to buy school items such as exercise books, pens, etc, I buy them too"***.

The undercurrents of what he does, are measured in a far superior scale than any currency presently could and provides a ray of hope to the country endeavouring to build bridges and reconciliation. His initiative has become a pillar of inter faith harmony in Puttalam district where all major ethnicities cohabit. It is the little acts of kindness of the likes of Jayasena that bind the communities towards peaceful co-existence. Jayasena ended the conversation with a simple, yet thought provoking notion which hints of the importance of communal participation towards change, rather than hoping for the government to do everything. ***"All it takes is a simple thought to initiate something like this. If a handful of people decide to step in, the impact would be unimaginable"***.

SAPRI joins efforts to Minimize Market Barriers on Food Security

South Asia Policy & Research Institute (SAPRI) was invited to be a part of the Workshop on "The Lessons Sharing & Policy Consultation Workshop on Policy Options for Ensuring Food Security in Sri Lanka" held at Club Palm Bay Hotel, Marawila, on the 3rd and 4th of November. Thanura Mendis, represented SAPRI.

The workshop, organized by National Science Foundation and Institute of Policy Studies, focused on a multi market analysis of Rice, Fish and Dairy Products, under a four-year national thematic research programme on food security. The effort aimed at undertaking a multi-market analysis on demand and supply responses, with the objective of using the findings to recommend policy interventions to overcome barriers associated with existing market structures, in order to guarantee food security.

The workshop was attended by eminent representatives of the academia from the rice, fish and dairy sectors; the civil society as well as think tanks. SAPRI, having initiated a Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition toward Zero Hunger in Sri Lanka together with the World Food Programme, found the Workshop relevant to the objectives and scope of the Strategic Review as it provided an insight into a range of topics coming under SAPRI's programme.