faith and peace
Interfaith Cooperation Forum Newsletter

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A dream of a School of Peace participant at the conclusion of the program is to promote a better education for the children of her native Nagaland *(Photo from www.pinterest.com)*

The Past, the Future, Reunite at the School of Peace

Achi Ozukum

Based on her final reflective essay at the conclusion of the School of Peace (SOP), this participant grafted her experience in Indonesia onto her past awareness of life in Nagaland with her hopes for the future of her society and her people. **[Read more]**

Superpower Aspirations while 21 Percent of Children in India Waste Away

Asian Human Rights Commission

In spite of impressive figures indicating economic progress—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the country's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 6.32 percent from 1980 to 2016—too many of India's children do not have enough to eat. This article examines why. **[Read more]**

State Infringement of Peoples' Rights Allows Militancy in Pakistan to Continue Unabated

Javeria Younes

Extremism in the name of religion appears to be gaining a greater stranglehold on society in Pakistan with a more public presence, for instance, of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the country. However, the government's response has been a policy of denial and a lack of

meaningful action, thus creating the conditions for extremism to flourish all the more. **[Read more]**

Burma Must Act to Prevent Violence against Women in Conflict and Provide Justice for Victims

Progressive Voice

Violence in conflicts areas of Burma, such as in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States, is not confined to bullets and bombs. Sexual violence is another weapon employed by the Burmese army and other combatants that women in these areas must face. **[Read more]**

Prosecute Wartime Cases in Sri Lanka without Ethnic Bias

National Peace Council

Legal cases involving Sri Lankan military personnel were transferred in the past from courts in predominantly Tamil areas of the country to Sinhalese-dominated parts of Sri Lanka despite risks to Tamil civilian witnesses. Now the Attorney General's Dept. wants to transfer cases involving Tamil prisoners from Tamil-majority areas to Sinhalese-majority areas because of fear for the safety of Sinhalese witnesses. Tamils naturally view this decision as a reflection of ethnic bias. **[Read more]**

The Enemy

Thich Nhat Hanh

This Buddhist spiritual leader, long-time peace activist and poet from Vietnam shares his poetic reflections about who and what is the enemy today and always. **[Read more]**

Achi Ozukum met a grandmother and her grandson in the area around Omah Petroek where the School of Peace was held outside of Yogyakarta in Indonesia. *(Photo by Achi Ozukum)*

The Past, the Future, Reunite at the School of Peace

Achi Ozukum

Dear Future Me,

How fast time flies! Can you believe it has been 10 years since we attended the School of Peace 2017 in Indonesia?! The time we went to places we never even dreamt we'd have the opportunity to see, the lifelong friendships we forged, the experiences that moved us, stirred us—sometimes overwhelming and sometimes subtle—but ever nudging us, pushing us to look deep within ourselves, and then we realized that things are never going to be the same again.

I remember the many religious places we went to, the religious leaders we interacted with—the priests, pastors, imams, monks—oh, what numerous hues, what beautiful shapes, what diverse forms the different religions took, and yet, beneath it all, they all spoke one universal language of devotion, discipline, love and humanity. How sad it is that we have managed to set a race against each other, built walls around ourselves, pointing fingers, finding faults, seeking superiority over the others as though our God, Divine Being, Creator, our Paradise or even Nature would be so small to encourage our petty squabbles.

Remember how much we learnt about other cultures? Each distinct in its character, shaped through space and time, passed from one generation to another, having fought battles of the body, mind and heart to be where they are today. Each glorious on its own—none greater, none unimportant—shaped by men and helping shape identities of men in turn. How it reaffirmed our love and pride in our cultural heritage, how it made us realize how little we know of our own, how we feared of how little we can pass on to our future if we do not go back and learn more before all is lost.

Remember how we learnt about the culture of oppression? How we then realized there is no such thing as the lazy downtrodden? How systems are manipulated, so as to create a culture of dependency, and how all these trap “the least” in a perpetual cycle of hopelessness. How much more then, our duty to stand in solidarity with the marginalized, the disempowered, the invisible.

Today the Naga youth scream a silent scream. The young, their wings clipped, their dreams contained, their hopes clouded with doubt. On their shoulders, unreasonable expectations and impossible duties to be fulfilled. The decadent political system remains indifferent, distant and detached. Their fortified, thick-walled palaces shunning out the sound of the cries of the common people—opulent living, endless revelry. The systems that were supposed to enable the people, the youth, has failed them. Our education system has failed to make them analyze and think critically. It has made most of them see without opening their eyes, seek without the consent of their hearts and grab as much as they want when they get their chances.

Our teachings and philosophies have made us chess pieces, stripped of our humanness, striving only to gain, conquer and dominate. Perhaps our cultural decay has made us care

less about our community's well-being and has made us limit ourselves to building our individual worlds, ignoring the bigger picture. I fear for the world we are creating. What are we building? What are we leaving behind for our future?

I remember how we wrestled with our thoughts about what we can really do for our society. Confused and ill-qualified, all we had was our will and aspirations. Our society tells us that hoping and dreaming are for the foolish and a waste of time. But can we really afford to listen to them? All I want for us is to aspire and do all we possibly can, as little as that may seem, but constantly moving, ceaseless in our efforts to affect change, one small task at a time, one person at a time. I know we can never be alone in this: there are and will always be people who are doing much more, and there are and will always be people with a shared common will. Pray that we each create our own ripples until our ripples turn to waves, gaining strength and crashing into the rocky shores until we end up shaping our land.

Today our society is entrenched in corruption, and the pursuit for selfish gains has made everyone blind towards the common good. To each his own, they say, while the rural folks and the poor struggle to make ends meet doing backbreaking jobs.

Where has our sense of community disappeared? Our ancestors centered all their activities around the community. Perhaps they were wise beyond us to see that individual pursuits of greed will eventually lead us to our decay. Each action was given thorough thought. Each action was seen from the perspective of its future impact. Each action was to lift up the community and build a sense of a common goal. What good is our "modern" society if the values it upholds are deprived of such wisdom?

We built a common dream. A dream to work for the rural poor. To help enable them to have a fair chance at life. I hope we are still working at it.

We were fortunate and blessed enough to have gotten the best education given the time and circumstances we were in. Yet how much we used to wish the educational system that prevailed at that time was different and more effective. How we realized its irrelevance with time and context. Our chance of exposure to the outside world helped us realize that the education we have in place at home neither catered to the specific needs of the students

nor did it cater to molding and facilitating productive individuals with a deep sense of love for their people, culture and their environment.

Do you still remember how much of a revelation it was to see up close the quality of education the rich could afford? How their education encouraged creativity, helped them express effectively without restraint and gave them liberty enough to mold themselves according to their own personality and how this system put the student first. Their strengths were observed, channeled and honed to help them achieve greater heights. It was then we started to weave a dream to find ways to make even the poor able to have access to this kind of education. The question then loomed over us when all they can afford is an education that keeps them confined in the cycle of hopelessness. Where is their fair chance at life and living?

Our dream to start an effective and an evolved system of education in our village seemed too big a dream, but I hope that we have by now not only managed to make headway but also have started to dream bigger. I hope we both will always continue to draw motivation from the numerous children who, for want of a better education, are sent to the towns and cities with hopes for a brighter future only to have their hopes and dreams shattered, finding themselves subjected to exploitation, hunger and degradation. We cannot, and must not, ignore the silent prayers they pray. If our future lies with the young, the future of the oppressed young matters even more. The Sekolh Rimba and Mangunan School have shown us that good, effective education need not be expensive and exclusive. I believe we must show by example how we can model our own systems to cater to the needs and requirements of the children of the rural poor.

I hope our dream of reviving our traditional system of education, the Ariju, and its integration with modern schooling has not only taken shape but also is balancing culture and traditions with necessary modernization. We always knew that it would be a perilous journey to undertake when dealing with upholding culture in a male-dominated system with “tradition guardians,” more often than not, upholding out of context a distorted interpretation of culture. I hope we will always remain wise and tactful when we face adversities, but never give up on the task we chose to take up.

I hope the remodeled Ariju will cater to the needs of the students, empower them to take control of their future, help them develop analytical thinking, see with compassionate eyes,

preserve their cultural heritage with pride, live lives of dignity and help inculcate a greater sense of awareness towards their environment and towards their community. I hope we have or we are on to making the community where we choose to work have a sense of ownership and responsibility over the Ariju. Above all else, I hope this system will always allow for flexibility and give enough room for learning and evolving, but never compromise our beliefs and stance.

I hope Nagaland is a more enlightened society than it is today. A society that never ceases to question and think critically and not blindly conform. A state whose marginalized now understand and realize their power more. I hope our voices resonate along with the voices of the marginalized against injustices in the spirit of brotherhood. As much as we would like to think our rural counterparts need us, in reality, we need them as much, if not more.

In this time when the world is preoccupied with selfish pursuits, our hope lies in going back to the wisdom of our ancestors for a more conscious and responsible society. No matter where life takes us, may we never forget the blood of our ancestors that runs through us. They speak of a time of valor, honor, dignity, wisdom, compassion and brotherhood. For them, every individual was for their community, and the community for its individuals. May this spirit continue to live in us and through us.

Yours sincerely,

Achi Ozukum

Achi Ozukum from Nagaland in northeast India was a participant in the 2017 School of Peace (SOP) conducted by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) for three months from July to October near Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that India's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at a rate of 7.62 percent in 2016, making it the fourth fastest growing economy in the world. In spite of these noteworthy statistics, more than 20 percent of the country's children still suffer from malnutrition today. *(Photo from www.thenewsism.com)*

Superpower Aspirations while 21 Percent of Children in India Waste Away

Asian Human Rights Commission

With the publication of the 2017 Global Hunger Index Report, it is clear that India's dreams of becoming a superpower with world class airports and bullet trains are all hyperbole. The utopian narrative of modern India overlooks the fact that it is a country that fell three places to 100 in the 2017 Hunger Index and 45 places overall since 2014. It is also a country which has 21 percent of its children wasted, a one percentage point increase from 1990 to

1994 when it was at 20. In other words, for nearly 25 years, India has failed its children while moving ahead in other areas.

The government is attempting to suggest that the fall of 45 places is due to the technical reason that the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide, which together compiled the report, added countries with gross hunger index scores of less than 5 (where hunger is not a problem) to the overall list. And yet India still fell three places from last year's rankings. It still has 38.40 percent of its children stunted. It has one of the lowest hunger reduction figures since the Global Hunger Index started ranking countries.

The most distressing aspect is that India is perhaps the only country performing this badly despite having the means to fight and even eradicate hunger. India is a country with food grain surpluses for more than three years but has thousands of tons of grain rotting in the warehouses of the Food Corp. of India (FCI) due to a lack of space and maintenance. The government informed Parliament that more than 11,889 tons of food grains had **rotted** in FCI warehouses between 2015–2016 and 2016–2017.

India is a country with millions to spend on gigantic statues of leaders. Moreover, it writes off loans worth billions of dollars given to corporate tycoons every year as non-performing assets, but it is a country that makes up for that by **funding cuts to welfare programs**, resulting in the starvation deaths of children.

It is thus no wonder that India is behind even Nepal, a landlocked and impoverished country hit by one of the worst earthquakes in history in 2015. Even Bangladesh, far poorer than India and a victim of annual floods that displace millions, is far ahead of India in saving its children and snatching them from malnutrition and wasting.

India fails its children not through a lack of resources or programs, both of which are plentiful. No, the issue is one of implementation, for the Supreme Court of India has many times criticized the government over its **"woeful implementation"** of wonderful programs to tackle child malnutrition.

India furthermore keeps failing its poor children, one of the most vulnerable sections of society, because of the increasing gap between the poor and the rich and because watchdogs, like the media, turn into cronies of the regime. It will keep failing to eliminate hunger until hunger gets a political currency of its own and can shame the political

establishment into action. Sadly, with the current government being far more interested in polarizing and divisive issues, like the beef ban for hurting religious sentiments, banning eggs in midday meals for children—again for the same reason—change does not look like it will take place anytime soon.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) works towards the radical rethinking and fundamental redesigning of justice institutions in order to protect and promote human rights in Asia. Established in 1984, the Hong Kong-based organization is a laureate of the Right to Livelihood Award in 2014.

The existence of ISIS in Pakistan is becoming more apparent, such as the appearance of the organization's flag publicly hanging in the nation's capital—a presence though that the government denies. *(Photo from www.pakistantoday.com)*

State Infringement of Peoples' Rights Allows Militancy in Pakistan to Continue Unabated

Javeria Younes

In the face of the world pointing accusatory fingers at Pakistan for harboring terrorists and militants, plus U.S. President Donald Trump's threat of sanctions against the country, government officials are denying the existence of militancy in the country. The timing of the world's most dangerous militant organization ISIS to announce its presence in the capital city could not have been worse. After the fall of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East, it appears that the group is set to make Pakistan its next base.

The Pakistani government and security agencies have been denying the existence of ISIS, or Daesh (Arabic acronym for ISIS), in the country despite the presence of rampant

wall-chalking welcoming ISIS and pledges of allegiance to the terrorist and internationally proscribed organization. Since 2014, there have been cases reported of pamphlets being distributed containing jihadist literature and proclaiming non-Muslims as infidels and preaching to Muslims to cleanse the infidels from their midst.

The Ostrich Syndrome, from which the government and establishment of Pakistan is suffering, has done little to stop ISIS from gaining roots in the country. On Sept. 24, 2017, for instance, a banner was placed on an overhead bridge located on the Islamabad Expressway—a main artery of the city. The banner had an ISIS flag along with the slogan the "Khilafat Is Coming" inscribed on it. The banner was visible from afar. It remained there for a couple of hours before being taken down by the authorities after a person complained.

Ironically, the complainant was detained by the police for questioning and asked how he knew it was the flag of ISIS. One is flabbergasted by the naivety of the local police despite the threat of militancy being so rampant in the country and pro-ISIS slogans appearing on walls in several cities across the country.

The failure of the state machinery to curtail allegiance to the militant organization is beyond comprehension. Despite a major share of the national gross domestic product (GDP) allocated to fight militancy and internal threats to the country, one hardly finds any decisive action being taken against extremist elements, such as ISIS, to exterminate the root cause of militancy once and for all. However, given the institutionalized discrimination against minorities and marginalized groups in the Constitution itself, curbing militancy and extremism is akin to wishful thinking.

In fact, ISIS fighters are rather seen as saviors—knights in shining armor—by the Muslim clergy. In 2015, the female students of Jamia Hafsa, a religious school associated with the radical Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad, called upon ISIS fighters in a video statement to help their Muslim sisters and seek revenge for the hundreds of martyred students killed in military operations. Moreover, in mid-2014, pro-ISIS graffiti and propaganda, namely, a booklet called *Fateh*, appeared on the streets of Peshawar, Karachi and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

A lack of coherent policies and the implementation of a national action plan, coupled with a policy of denial, has caused the problem to increase in complexity and gain ground with other terrorist organizations creating their own franchises of ISIS. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Pakistan's former interior minister, reportedly stated that "the militant Islamic State group, which is a Middle Eastern organization, has no presence in Pakistan." He added, "Daesh does not exist in Pakistan."

Even the most talked about national action plan, which is in its third year of promulgation, was termed ambiguous and ineffective by the Quetta Hospital Carnage Inquiry Commission that was released by the Supreme Court. In the report, it is stated that extremist organizations are operating quite freely, nepotism in appointments is pervasive, ministries are generally irresponsive and authorities are inaccessible to the public. The commission also found that the national action plan was not a plan structured or significant nor has its goals been accordingly monitored or implemented. Consequently, it should be made into a proper plan with clear goals, a comprehensive monitoring mechanism and periodic reviews. It should also be translated into Urdu for wider dissemination and understanding as recommended by the commission.

Over a period of years, Pakistan has become a Security State where laws curtailing peoples' rights have been surreptitiously passed without taking the public into their confidence. Thus, people may find themselves entrapped in a web of legislation if, God forbid, they are accused of harboring an anti-state ideology. For example, in 2013, the Fair Trial Act was passed by Parliament, a law that allowed law enforcement and intelligence agencies to seek surveillance warrants against individuals whom they consider to likely be involved in anti-state terrorist activities.

Legal experts maintain that a person can be potentially condemned and not heard since a surveillance warrant under this law can be issued against them without even hearing their point of view. Moreover, the law was passed without due debate in Parliament. Ironically, the law did exactly the opposite of its intended purpose, i.e., ensure a fair trial.

The State has adopted a policy whereby laws against natural justice are passed arbitrarily and surreptitiously. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for people to be aware of

the existence of such laws and the subsequent curtailment of their fundamental rights whereas the militants are afforded ample space to go free.

The policy of delayed tactics against militancy means that the proscribed organizations continue their illegal activities and new terrorist organizations are proscribed only after long delays. Some terrorist organizations have still not been proscribed or prosecuted even when their statements acknowledging terrorist attacks are broadcasted and printed.

Terrorism has its roots in the orthodox interpretation of religion whereby it is used as a tool of oppression rather than enlightenment and moderation. Paying lip service to militancy, while treating them as proxies against other countries, has become the State's policy. No wonder the law enforcement agencies take action harder and with lightning speed against any liberal dissenter while the same government sluggishly reacts when dealing with militants and militancy.

Is it a mere coincidence that oppressive laws, such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), took less than a year to be promulgated and implemented while laws which curtail the impunity of law enforcement agencies, such as the Torture Act, are not even considered worthy of consideration? Pakistan is a signatory to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and has an obligation under this U.N. international treaty to promulgate a law against torture.

The state apparatus must quash the militants and militancy tendencies by promoting an egalitarian, equitable and pluralistic society where each citizen has a right to be treated equitably and justly and where the vulnerable do not feel threatened and are not ostracized for being different in terms of their religion, caste, ethnicity or socio-economic background. The country's future lies in its people; and unless the State invests in the development of its population, the country cannot expect to prosper and rise in the commune of nations as a viable and sustainable nation.

Javeria Younes is a lawyer, social activist and legal researcher striving for an egalitarian society free from torture. She has written a handbook on torture that helps victims seek medical, legal and psychological aid. She can be reached at <javeria.younes@live.com>.

Rohingya women and other women in conflict areas of Burma constantly face the threat of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war. *(Photo from www.albawaba.com)*

Burma Must Act to Prevent Violence against Women in Conflict and Provide Justice for Victims

Progressive Voice

On Oct. 27, 2017, the annual U.N. Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security focused the attention of the U.N. system on the successes and gaps in implementing U.N. Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325. The debate covered a number of conflict-affected countries, including Burma. The representative of Bangladesh noted that "rape and sexual abuse of Rohingya women was being used as a tactic of ethnic cleansing in Myanmar" and called on the United Nations to take stronger action. In her most recent report, the U.N. special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, also called for accountability for sexual violence and other crimes committed in conflict areas.

In late October 2017, women around the world posted on social media about their experiences with sexual harassment and violence using the hashtag #metoo. While public testimonies such as these are important, many more victims of sexual violence face serious obstacles to speaking out, particularly in the context of armed conflict. In Burma, public accusations of abuses by the Burmese army have commonly led to different forms of reprisals by the army, including criminal charges of defamation against the victims. The cost of speaking out is not counterbalanced by an opportunity for justice or redress for most women. Most cases of sexual violence in Burma, especially committed by state forces in conflict areas, go unpunished, and resources for victims are almost non-existent.

In the past few weeks, human rights organizations have documented rape and other forms of sexual violence committed systematically against Rohingya women and children during "clearance operations" by the Burmese army. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has reported treating dozens of victims of sexual violence in the refugee camps, including many girls under 10 years of age. After the first visit of the U.N. fact-finding mission to Bangladesh to interview Rohingya refugees, an expert on children and armed conflict commented that "[t]he accounts of sexual violence that I heard from victims are some of the most horrendous I have heard in my long experience in dealing with this issue in many crisis situations."

The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in Rakhine State follows a well-documented pattern from other conflict areas in Burma. These cases have rarely been prosecuted. Cases that do go to trial are, for the most part, conducted behind closed doors by a military tribunal; and in many cases, the accused are charged with less serious offenses, and the sentences imposed are light.

While most documented cases of sexual violence in conflict areas have allegedly been committed by Burmese army troops, in late October 2017, the Burmese army accused two soldiers of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) of raping the headmistress of a school in Kyaukme Township in Shan State. The spokesperson of the TNLA confirmed that the TNLA had arrested the two suspects and would try them in a TNLA military court.

In 2014, Burma signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, a non-binding commitment to take a number of steps toward prevention and redress of

sexual violence in conflict areas. However, Burma has still not taken the steps enumerated in the Declaration of Commitment nor has it drafted a national action plan as called for by UNSC Resolution 1325 in order to implement its commitments to prevent and redress sexual violence in conflict. While a new Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women (POVAW) Act is on the agenda of the current session of Parliament, it does not sufficiently address sexual violence in conflict.

The world must not forget that campaigns, such as #metoo, to recognize the everyday violence committed against women remain far from the reach of women in conflict. Without the necessary steps toward prevention and accountability, sexual violence remains common in conflict areas in Burma. In order to fulfill its commitments and prevent sexual violence, the Burmese government should draft a national action plan on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, incorporating women's voices from conflict-affected communities and rights-based civil society. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and the Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Law should include provisions that address accountability for sexual violence and reparation for victims.

Meanwhile, the military must stop committing such crimes and should transfer cases of sexual violence to civilian courts as is already permitted by law. The civilian government should furthermore prioritize constitutional reform in order for the military to be under civilian control and to end military impunity. Crucial as well to prevention and protection is an improved system of protection for victims when they file complaints and speak out against the military and reform of the defamation laws that can currently be used to file criminal charges against victims of serious human rights violations, including sexual violence.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war perpetuates conflict and leaves a legacy of pain and suffering. Until the cycle of impunity is broken by holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring reparation for victims, these crimes will continue, and true peace and reconciliation will be unattainable.

Progressive Voice, formerly known as Burma Partnership, is a participatory rights-based policy research and advocacy organization rooted in civil society that maintains strong networks and relationships with grassroots organizations and community-based organizations throughout

Burma. It acts as a bridge to the international community and international policymakers by amplifying voices from the local level and advocating for a rights-based policy narrative.

People protest in Jaffna, a Tamil-majority area in the North of Sri Lanka, against the transfer of court cases involving Tamil prisoners to a predominantly Sinhalese area of the country, fearing it is a reflection of ethnic bias in the country. *(Photo from www.tamilguardian.com)*

Prosecute Wartime Cases in Sri Lanka without Ethnic Bias

National Peace Council

Public protests have been continuing in the North of Sri Lanka against a decision by the Attorney General's Dept. to transfer three Prevention of Terrorism (PTA) cases from the Vavuniya High Court to Anuradhapura. Students at the University of Jaffna have launched a university-wide boycott of classes until further notice as student leaders are scheduled to discuss a future course of protest action. Earlier in the month of October protests in Jaffna

led to the closure of commercial establishments and schools in Jaffna, and transport services came to a halt.

The three prisoners in the Anuradhapura prison are reported to have gone on hunger strike and have been admitted to the hospital in Anuradhapura due to the deterioration of their health. Among their main demands is that the government should return the court cases to Vavuniya and also take steps to release more than 100 other suspected members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are being detained under the PTA on the grounds that they are political prisoners. In the aftermath of the insurrection of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuṇa (JVP or People's Liberation Front) in which large numbers of Sinhalese militants were imprisoned, the government took steps to pardon and release them.

The rationale for the transfer of the cases involving the LTTE suspects is that the Sinhalese witnesses feel unsafe in Vavuniya. However, the transfer from a court in a Tamil-majority area to another court in a Sinhalese-majority area has implications of ethnic bias. As justice needs to be done, as well as be seen to be done, it is important that the governmental authorities should be more sensitive to the ethnic perceptions of justice and be consistent in their practices.

The National Peace Council (NPC) notes that there needs to be consistency in policy on the transfer of cases and the protection of witnesses. There have been instances in the past when cases against Sri Lankan military personnel have been transferred from Tamil-majority areas to Sinhalese-majority areas despite possible security risks imposed on the Tamil civilian witnesses. We call on the government to provide security to the witnesses of the three cases so that they can continue to be heard in the Vavuniya High Court.

The NPC also believes that the larger and complex issue of pardons and the release of those held for crimes committed for political reasons could be brought within the framework of the U.N. Human Rights Council resolution on accountability, which the government has promised to implement and to ensure there is no ethnic bias. Past practices, such as the pardoning and release of those involved in the intense violence of the JVP insurrections in the 1970s and 1980s, need to be also considered.

The National Peace Council (NPC) is an independent and non-partisan organization that works towards a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It has a vision of a

peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka in which the freedom, human rights and democratic rights of all communities in the country are respected. The policy of the NPC is determined by its governing council of 20 members who are drawn from diverse walks of life and who belong to all the main ethnic and religious communities in the country.

Thich Nhat Hanh *(Photo from https://plumvillage.org)*

The Enemy

Thich Nhat Hanh

The enemy is not a person

If you kill people, with whom will you live?

The enemy's name is cruelty

The enemy's name is lack of conscience

Its name is hatred, its name is bitterness

It is the name of a group of phantoms

The enemy wears a coat of doctrine

The enemy wears the pretense of freedom

It wears hypocrisy, it wears twisted words

It wears the disease that keeps us apart

Think of the pity of the weak

Think of the pity of innocence

Pity the sellouts, pity the cheater

Pity those who pity us

The enemy is not in the stranger

It lies inside of each of us

The enemy's name is false accusation

The enemy's name is ignorance

Its name is ambition, its name is envy

Its name is jealous hatred

The enemy's name is covetous eyes

The enemy's name is arrogant head

Its name is a lonely heart, its name is a narrow mind

Its name is the dream of conquest

The enemy is not a person

If you kill people, with whom will you live?

The enemy is not in the stranger

It lies inside of each of us.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a 91-year-old Vietnamese spiritual teacher of Zen Buddhism, an activist for peace and a poet. He is a proponent of being mindful in the present moment as a means to attaining inner peace and peace in the world. During the Vietnam War in the 1960s, Thich Nhat Hanh chose to work for peace in his country and to help the people suffering from the war as well as to continue meditating. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967.

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