
THE ECONOMICS OF PEACE: THE WORLD BANK, INFORMATION ASYMMETRIES, AND THE POST-CONFLICT INDUSTRY

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*Would it not be simpler, if the government could dissolve
the people and elect another?*

(Bertol Brecht)

*Knives will tell you that it is because you have no property
that you are un-represented. I tell you, on the contrary, that
it is because you are unrepresented that you have no
property.*

(English Chartist Bonterre O'Brien, 1846, quoted in
Elizabeth Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent
Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*, CUP, 2000)

Introduction

Wars, including struggles for ethno-national self-determination and representation are fought to change the power-property status quo. If a peace process fails to adequately acknowledge and address issues of economic and social inequality that structured the conflict, while balancing changes wrought in the war years against return to the pre-war power-property status quo, it may result in an unsustainable peace that becomes a blue print for renewed violence, years or decades later. Thus, in a recent book published by the Washington-based United States Institute for Peace, titled *Effects of Violence on Peace Processes*, John Darby notes: Of the thirty-eight formal peace accords signed between January 1988 and December 1998, thirty one failed to last more than three years. Darby suggests that the reason for this state of affairs is that stopping wars is far more difficult than starting them, and that when political violence is ended by a ceasefire it reappears in other forms to threaten the peace process. He suggests that a peace process must be forward looking and potential spoilers of the peace must be on board, for if not they may destabilize the peace process. In Sri Lanka this would include potential spoilers who may use local conflicts and social and economic inequality that are not directly related to the macro armed conflict between the LTTE and GoSL.

A number of studies of the two decades-long armed conflict in Sri Lanka have noted that the war was not simply an ethnic affair but rather a complex emergency. The war was sustained and fuelled by a range of global and local actors and factors including rural poverty, unemployment, and caste marginalization (particularly in northern Tamil society and in the deep south). The

majority of those who fought, died, and were disabled on both sides were drawn from the rural poor. Additionally, in the last decade a war economy that developed a self-sustaining momentum emerged, as a number of trans-national actors and networks, from the diaspora to the military and humanitarian industry stabilized and sustained the conflict dynamic as the economy structured into a war economy. While a range of political actors and elites made profits through corruption, terror and taxation the military became the leading employer of a class of marginalized youth from low-caste communities in the north and south alike. Simultaneously, as Professor Tudor Silva of the Centre for Poverty Analysis has noted, economic inequality and poverty cleavages tended to be ethnicized and politicized due to the circular dynamic of poverty and ethnic conflict (cf. Mayer, Rajasingham-Senanayake, Thangaraja, 2003). The connection between rural poverty and the sustainability of peace has been made in other studies of peace settlements. In *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*, Elizabeth Wood suggests that peace processes that address economic re-distribution including land reform have a better chance of long-term success. Wood's arguments are relevant for Sri Lanka. Yet in the current post-conflict settlement discussion while the issue of power redistribution via a devolved and federated system has received high priority, issues of social and economic inequality are not being addressed in any systematic fashion.

Free Market and Social Justice

The presumption on faith propounded by the Minister for Economic Reforms seems to be that the free market would take care of social and economic justice issues that fuelled the conflict in the Washington Consensus (World Bank and IMF). There has been relatively little discussion of the political economic transformation to society that 20 years of war had generated. Debate on post-conflict reconstruction policy is largely framed by legal-bureaucratic considerations at the national level as to how power vested in a highly centralized state may be devolved to the regions? The public debate considerably influenced by global recipes for post-conflict reconstruction focused on (neo-liberal) institution building and constitution design and the need for good governance. In the context, it is not hard to see how economic hardship and social disaffection caused by spiralling costs of living, unemployment exacerbated by layoffs, a sealing on public sector

hiring for structural adjustment programs (SAPs), and privatization of essential services including public utilities (the standoff between the multinational gas duopoly Shell and Laufs and the Consumer Protection Authority being exemplary), may be used by peace spoilers who have significant constituencies among those who bare the brunt of the current phase of economic restructuring which in most parts of the world had demonstrably increased socio-economic disparities and cleavages (Cf. UNDP Human Development Report 2000).

In this context, the question may be raised as to why the GoSL and the LTTE have chosen or been impelled to chose the World Bank to be the custodian of the post-conflict fund? And on what basis? Historically, the United Nations is the international organization charged with and experienced in dealing with post-conflict reconstruction (East Timor being a recent example). Moreover, the UN agencies despite numerous critics have a relatively open attitude to human security, local voices, priorities and knowledge systems than has the World Bank, since it is not so closely allied to international finance and corporate interests, and in the grip of what Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel prize winning economist and ex-Vice President of the World Bank, terms market fundamentalism in his book *Globalization and its Discontents*. Is the World Bank then a more or less neutral actor or will it ensure that the peace is structured to suit the agendas of international finance and corporate capital while making Sri Lanka vulnerable to fluctuating global financial markets as the world economy goes into recession (as occurred in Argentina)? As conflict, security and development are increasingly linked will it disburse funds to projects that have a less capital friendly and more social justice focus?

These questions must be asked by the Sri Lankan public who support the peace process and wish to ensure its sustainability. There are other reasons for concern. A range of social conflicts have escalated in Latin American countries that undertook uncritical structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that made them vulnerable to fluctuations in global financial markets at the behest of the World Bank and IMF (riots in Argentina being a recent dramatic case). Likewise, historically, international finance capital, dictators and military juntas have been allied to safeguard their interests and deflect social justice issues embedded in complex conflicts. In this respect, the controversial analysis of violent conflict coming out of the World Bank research project led by Paul Collier on *The Economics of Civil War, Crime and Violence* is not encouraging. Collier claims that it is greed rather than grievance, (as if these are not relational terms). He suggests that the profits made by war lords and armed groups explain violence. He thus rules out economic grievance as a cause of violence. While this kind of analysis may explain the proposed Bush-Blair resource war on Iraq, it is telling in its misguidedness and ignorance of local issues, international political economic and global power/knowledge hierarchies that structure complex conflicts in the global south, and does not augur well for a sensibly theorized post-conflict reconstruction program supervised by the Bank in Sri Lanka. If the World bank is to be the custodian of the post-conflict fund the

question arises: will the peace dividend become available to those marginal communities and social groups that were most brutalized and instrumentalized by the war economy? In short, would a neo-liberal post-conflict peace that exacerbates socio-economic disparities as SAPs and sector adjustment programs are pushed through along with post-conflict reconstruction, and the questionable promise of long-term economic growth despite the growing global recession enable a sustainable peace? Is this constellation of actors and interests a recipe for a new cycle of violence that may destabilize the peace process in Sri Lanka? To answer this question it may be relevant to look back on how almost two decades of armed conflict was represented and analyzed in the World Development discourse in Sri Lanka.

Representing Development: 'Growth with War' and other Sustainable Myths

During the Second and Third Eelam wars (1990-2001), a public myth existed in the south of Sri Lanka that relatively high levels of economic growth could be sustained in the island while an expensive armed conflict was waged in the North-East provinces.¹ As the People's Alliance government went ahead with structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and privatization of various profitable and debt-ridden government holdings just as the previous UNP government had done, the numbers of BMWs and Alfa Romeos that cruised the highways and bi-lanes of Colombo, the southern capital, were on the rise. Signs of a growing economy and a market for luxury goods were apparent in the larger cities and in the display of sophisticated weapons to and communications technology in the security sector. The Central Bank projected national growth figures of five percent, a figure that helped the ruling party to win local and national elections and attract foreign investment. International development organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, and UNDP projected similar growth figures.

The late 1990s were years of converging national statistical percentages in Sri Lanka. While defence spending was five percent of GDP, donor assistance also hovered at around five percent GDP. That international aid might subsidize the armed conflict given fungibility of aid was not missed by a number of commentators. Yet if research staff in leading national institutions of higher education such as the University of Colombo could not use the internet because the Ministry of Higher Education could not pay its telephone bills and the library could not buy books and journals due to the toll of the war economy on the education sector that was being restructured, the international financial institutions turned a blind eye to military spending despite widely known and rumoured corruption in the military sector and the defence ministry. While structural adjustment to education, health etc., sometimes bringing long overdue reform to these sectors were on the cards, structural adjustments of the military and state's coercive apparatus was not on the cards.

Indeed, the IMF appeared to systematically underestimate the Sri Lanka government's underestimation of its own military expenses (discussion with IMF representative at ICES—August 2001) while the Sri Lanka government seemed to practice home grown military Keynesianism.² The continuing failure of the international development industry to address military budgets of governments at war with segments of their populations remains the scandal of international development industry. In Sri Lanka the growth rate of about five percent in the late 1990s despite the war seems to have been used to bolster the argument that neo-economic liberal structural adjustments works — even in conflict situations. What was ignored was that after almost two decades of armed conflict the rural economy seemed to be substantially and increasingly dependent on non-productive activity, i.e., war making (cf. Dunham 2000).

During these years, national statistics impervious to the law of averages, that excluded the under-performing north and eastern conflict affected provinces were produced by the Central Bank and seconded by organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP. It was suggested that excluding the northern and eastern provinces from national statistics was insignificant since population densities in those provinces were low, and would not affect per capita calculations.

Of course, statistics and information on the conflict zones were highly politicized, particularly given claims and counter-claims regarding human rights violations, numbers of displaced people, and food aid to be sent to the war zones. During the years of the third Eelam war that started in 1995 with the collapse of the peace process that had commenced when Chandrika Bandaranaike-Kumaratunge became President, the military frequently and possibly correctly argued that the LTTE was inflating figures and skimming excess aid.

The information lacuna arising from the politicization of information and the difficulties of information gathering in the war zones was compounded by the censorship on media and reporting from the northeast. Because of difficulties of information gathering in the conflict zones, national data on health, education and literacy excluded the war-deprived and traumatized regions of the island. International evaluations along with national statistics on many social and economic matters provided impressionistic and often grossly misleading and optimistic scenarios of the life and livelihood in the conflict zones. It was rarely mentioned that transport was literally by bullock cart in the uncleared or LTTE held areas, given the fuel and fertilizer embargo, while the economy and market had been bombed into the dark ages, and food security eroded.³

The information lacuna in turn perpetuated a number of myths that sustained the conflict, both at the level of policy as well as in popular discourse. As the conflict escalated in the 1990s, the notion that growth with war is possible appeared to be the operative fiction in policy circles. Meanwhile the conflict generated a war

economy with military service becoming the leading income generation project for young men from rural areas even as it generated new forms of social and economic inequality and marginalization (eg. Muslim-Tamil conflicts in the east coast). That Sri Lanka, the South Asian leader in social indicators, may be slipping in health and education, and mortgaging its future as the numbers of disabled increased, and the economy structured into a war economy, with the rural sector increasingly dependent on soldiers wages was not mentioned. Of course a second scenario of Sri Lanka's conflict-development nexus that focused on the social costs of war, was captured in popular films, other critical media, and by various studies by NGOs but with little impact.⁴ Squaring the circle — an analysis of which sectors benefited from the war economy and SAPs and which did not remains to be done.

On the other hand, the devastation of war in the north and east gave credence to LTTE claims that they had nothing more to lose, and hence must fighting an opponent intent on decimating them to the end. The war years made clear the domestic economic policy is increasingly a global affair. As the country became increasingly dependent on aid for fighting the war the international financial institutions and successive governments pursued a neo-liberal policy of economic restructuring. As privatization appeared to sustain the myth of growth with war, a number of other local and micro-conflicts were displaced upon the over determined war between the military and the LTTE. The myth of growth with war was rudely shattered by the LTTE attack on the airport and the manner in which the economic growth entered a negative for the first time in its post-colonial history.

Representing Development: Information Asymmetries and Power/Knowledge Hierarchies

International measures, indexes and observations of success or failure of nation-states, economies, or people, have their own logic. They establish authoritative descriptions, and construct truths about national progress or regress. Indeed a number of theorists of development and developmentalism (Escobar, 1995; Nandy, 1983; Gupta, 1998) have noted, that in the trajectory of world development, peoples, nations, regions, and the third world have come to see themselves as more or less developed, underdeveloped, and more or less in need of development, or social capital, or institutions, or better governance, or globalization etc. They have also suggested that development processes might actually de-develop societies, and have traced how development indicators may conceal increasing economic inequalities and social and regional polarization.

In countries with skeptical publics, information from international development and financial institutions are sometimes given greater authority because of the presumption that they may be more independent and accurate than government's figures. In turn, these authoritative indexes, measures, and narratives of developmental progress or regress configure local perceptions of local conditions.

Sometimes, these constructions and their policy agendas elicit counter-reactions and ethno-nationalist back lashes.⁵ In noting this dynamic of how a country may be measured, evaluated, and restructured for World Development, my purpose is not to suggest that poor people or armed conflicts do not exist. Rather it is to mark how poverty qua poverty, or conflict qua conflict, are constituted as objects of and for analysis and developmental-relief intervention (read power/knowledge), and how such interventions are legitimated.

In the late 1990s as the war escalated in Sri Lanka local and global political-economic processes and imperatives configured the dominant representation and interpretation of the conflict-development nexus in Sri Lanka, that growth with war was possible. The notion that war with growth was possible is a corollary of the economic reductionism that characterizes the argument that violence is economically rational and it is greed rather than grievance that fuels conflicts (Collier et al., 2001). 1997-98 were years when the Bank and IMF were increasingly critiqued on the crisis and escalating social violence in the Asian Tiger economies. Internally, in the World Bank, Stiglitz had criticized IMF policies and suggested that developmental macro-policy may fuel and deepen the crisis and ensuing violence in South East Asia (Stiglitz, 1997, 1998; Wade, 2000). In this context, success stories even in conflict torn societies were needed. In *Missed Opportunities*, the World Bank's Sri Lanka country report in 2000 suggested that Sri Lanka is a relative success in terms of economic liberalization and structural adjustments.

A story of operative fictions and mutual entrapment between international financial institutions and a government fighting a dirty war (given that national economic policy is increasingly globally configured), amidst an increasingly dysfunctional democracy emerges in the myth that growth with war was possible in Lanka. This entrapment in turn sustained the war dynamic which developed self-sustaining momentum (Rajasingham- Senakayake, 2001). The myth was shattered after the LTTE attack on Katunayake airport in July 2001 that impacted on sectors dependent on external markets, particularly trade, tourism and shipping, and the growth figures dipped from 5% into negative digits overnight. This entrapment may continue with the peace dynamic too with the government and World Bank promoting an unsustainable neo-liberal peace.

The myth that growth with war was possible was also enabled by the history of perception of the island as an outlier in the fifty-year-old world development discourse. Sri Lanka had always followed the path of the unexpected. At independence in 1948, armed conflict was not on the island's development agenda. The island's social indicators that were the best in the South Asian region despite very low per capita income, placed it in the category of outlier in the development discourse for decades. Moreover, a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-faith, and multi-cultural land, Ceylon as it was called then, had been considered a model

democracy until the mid-1980s. In the years of the conflict, growth in the south despite a debilitating armed conflict in the north and east further buttressed Sri Lanka's standing as an outlier in the world development discourse, and enabled the perception that it was a land of missed opportunities. The outlier perception of Sri Lanka masked the island's de-development and deep regional divisions that fuel the armed conflict in the island.

Indeed, it is arguable that the regional disparity between the conflict affected North-East and the rest of the island constituted one of the biggest challenges of peace building and development, even as the central barrier to human development in Sri Lanka may be the information divide and information lacuna. The engineering of information and the resulting ignorance generated at the highest levels of policy and opinion making on the national impacts of the war was one of the reasons that the war escalated to dire proportions, without giving rise to an anti-war peace movement in the late 1990s.

Conclusion: De-Development and the Poverty of Theory in Post-Conflict Policy

Post-conflict reconstruction, a growth sector in the world development industry led by the Bretton Woods institutions is about information asymmetries, global-local hierarchies of knowledge and power and the marketing of myths and models of development. Recognition by the development policy community that Sri Lanka was a complex emergency and that violent conflicts could undo years of development achievements, has not entailed acknowledgement of the converse process: that the macro-policies and practices of (uneven) development may also structure and fuel domestic political-economic transformations and societal polarization leading to violent conflicts. Possible linkages between development processes that exacerbated social inequality and a number of social tensions (JVP and LTTE youth uprisings), contributed to overdetermine the north-south ethnic divide in the island, and hence the need for mainstreaming conflict analysis into development policy and planning are hardly acknowledged. There is a need to link macro-policies of development to the local war economy in the conflict zone, rather than treating them as separate.

It is arguable that trans-historical ethnic readings of the violence in Sri Lanka and neo-liberal myths that growth with war is possible in the dependent economies of the global south have obscured issues of economic and social inequality that structured the two decades-long armed conflict in the north and east of Sri Lanka. They also obscured how the war had transformed the island's society and political economy. But issues of political representation and economic justice are inextricably linked: self-determination will remain an unfulfilled promise without economic and social rights.

After the initial de-politicization that the peace process necessitated, it would be necessary to move on and deal seriously with political

economic issues by linking civil and political issues of demilitarization and de-escalation with social justice issues or economic and social rights. Post-conflict reconstruction must have a holistic approach and move beyond a formalist legal approach to devolution and power sharing among the armed actors and the State, and address issues such as poverty, inequality and their relationship to macro-policies of economic adjustment and conflict. Otherwise, the risk is that a peace agreement might once again become a blue print for more war, or be merely a trade off between armed groups and politicians who peddle ethnic conflict or ethnic peace to shore up their vote banks. Rather, the need is for substantive democratic reform and transformation of political culture and economic ideology and institutions (including the state's coercive apparatus) that have generated and fuelled multiple conflicts and much of the violence over twenty years.

The dominance of the World Bank in the post-conflict reconstruction industry and the manner in which a range of structural adjustments projects (including the recently stymied labour bill) are being pushed through parliament as the peace process takes centre stage in national politics may suggest otherwise. Structural adjustments usually mean that things must get worse before they get better if ever. Things getting worse usually mean another cycle of conflict that is very hard to stop once started, as Darby has noted. The timing of these interventions in the long-term may lead to increased levels of unemployment, spiralling cost of essential services and living and the unravelling of the peace process by spoilers who exploit popular disaffection. Argentina, where riots and social unrest has occurred in the wake of massive neo-liberal reform, sounds a warning to us all.

My purpose here is not to decry all reform. Certainly reform in the energy, education, public and social sectors and administrative and governance structures is necessary. The point, however, is that the neo-liberal agenda may not be the most appropriate type of reform. What seems to be forgotten in the post-conflict and developmental emphasis on good governance (based on the model and language of corporate governance despite Arthur Anderson, Enron and the expanding of corporate scandals) is that institutions are embedded in social, cultural and political process. The formalist focus institutions and constitutions often reduce democracy to actually existing free market democracy and may result in a new cycle of war as peace spoilers use the grievance of spiralling costs of living and real and perceived increases in economic inequalities to upset the peace.

Finally, the question remains: will humanitarian and post-conflict aid effectively subsidize SAPs and the country's adjustment to Global Capital(ism)? As the various MPs tour Switzerland, Canada etc., for constitutional models they may as well read Stiglitz and visit third world Latin American countries in conflict and post-conflict situations that have a far closer profile and learn from economic debate and debacles in that region, not to mention Africa. What informed critical debate in those countries may suggest is that after almost two decades of armed violence in Sri Lanka

building a sustainable peace would entail political and economic reform aimed at achieving substantive rather than ritual or procedural democracy and the need for re-distributive justice. By substantive democracy what is meant here is, economic and social as well as civil and political aspects of democratic practice.

A striking example of the failure to connect the issues of social justice with political reform is evident in how the property rights of displaced people are being addressed as if the pattern of violence and displacement in the agrarian peasant communities had no relationship to prior competition over land between peasants of the various ethnic communities, and issues of land settlement and redistribution. Redistribution has been a fundamental aspect of peace processes in Guatemala and El Salvador and other parts of the world. In Zimbabwe the failure to address the issue of land in the first instance arguable has fuelled the recent land disputes from which Mugabe has made political capital. The post-conflict settlement in Sri Lanka if it is to be sustainable in short must take into account issues of poverty and property rather than seeking to extend the interests of international corporations. In short, the peace process will have to balance the right of return of the (individual) property of the displaced with the new (collective) allotment of territory that the war has affected and notions of individual rights with notions of collective or social property.

Finally it seems a propos to quote Amartya Sen, another Nobel Prize winning economist's response to a question by a Pakistani Journalist at the Lahore based *Dawn*:

Journalist: Conditions imposed by international financial institutions sometimes prevent recipient countries, even democracies, from acting in the interests of their own people. How can this problem be solved?

Sen: I think that is a correct diagnosis, though things used to be even worse than they are today. In the past, conditions imposed by the IMF and the World Bank proved quite counterproductive instead of serving the interests of the poor. They often saw expenditure on such things as education and nutritional supplementation through cheapening of food as bureaucratic, governmental expenditure that hinders a country's efforts towards economic development. This is, of course, a mistake. But the understanding has improved in the case of the Bank under the leadership of James Wolfensohn. However, some of the Bank's practices may not be entirely in accordance with his guidelines and of course, there is need for the IMF to seize these issues more fully.

Sen sounds optimistic that the Bank can learn from the past. We will have to wait and see and monitor what's being said on the peace process in the streets of Colombo and in the post-conflict zones of the north and east. Already there are signs that some people are becoming nostalgic for the war economy, when the cost of living was less burdensome than it is today as the neoliberal peace looms on the horizon. In the meantime, it may be relevant to do a conflict analysis of the post-conflict reconstruction package by

analyzing links between the macro-policies of development including SAPs and cycles of violence. Sri Lanka simply cannot afford another cycle of conflict between its diverse ethnic and religious communities that co-existed in relative peace for centuries before the World Development industry led by the Bretton Woods institutions and the international military industrial complex came along.

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Notes

- ¹ The previous UNP government had managed to sustain growth and wage war, but by following a strategy of containing the conflict, and limited war.
- ² It was noted that the Government's estimate was an underestimate of total defense expenditure, after the various military service sectors were accounted.
- ³ See *Voices of the Poor*, ADB Poverty Study, 2000.
- ⁴ *Pura Handa Kaluwara* (Death on a full moon night) directed by Prasanna Vithanage, a film that commented critically on the futility of war and its social costs, was banned by the authorities and then unbanned following a prolonged legal battle and the Supreme Court ruling that the ban violated the freedom of artistic expression.
- ⁵ Michel Foucault's work on the dynamics of discourse and power to construct and represent an authorized social reality, and Nandy's work on how global discourses come to structure local realities and subjectivities has given us the tools to unveil some of the mechanisms by which certain orders of knowledge are produced as permissible modes of being and thinking, while others are disqualified, also in the historically singular experience, if not teleology of world development. ■

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PROPOSAL TO RESUME JUDICIAL HANGINGS

We view with deep dismay the proposal to reintroduce judicial executions after a lapse of over quarter of a century.

We are certainly concerned with crime control and law enforcement, and appreciate the serious law and order problem facing the authorities. But the death penalty is no answer.

Nowhere has the death penalty (as opposed to other punishments such as long-term imprisonment) been shown to have any special power to deter crime. On the contrary, it diverts attention from the real solution, which is prompt and efficient investigation of crime followed by effective prosecution and conviction. *The greatest deterrent to crime is the likelihood that offenders will be apprehended, convicted and punished. It is that which is lacking in our criminal justice system (South African judgment of 6 June 1995 in which all eleven members of the Constitutional Court, writing separate judgments, found the death penalty unconstitutional).*

The death penalty is irreversible, and is known to have resulted in the execution of innocent persons. In England alone there have been a number of proved instances of wrongful convictions being set aside many years later. Can we say that our own investigative, law enforcement and legal systems are such that there is no real possibility of innocent persons being convicted and scapegoats being hanged? It is precisely in cases that mostly shock public opinion that there is pressure on the police to somehow make arrests and ensure convictions. Miscarriages of justice, **of which the poor and the disadvantaged are the most likely victims**, can never be rectified. As Secretary General of the UN Kofi Annan has said, *The forfeiture of life is too absolute, too irreversible, for one person to inflict it on another even when backed by the legal process. Let states that still use the death penalty stay their hand lest in days to come they look back with remorse knowing it is too late to redeem their grievous mistake.*

It is the responsibility of an enlightened legislature to give the lead towards the adoption of rational and humane approaches to the ills of society. There is urgent need for careful and serious study of crime in Sri Lanka and the problems of investigation and law enforcement. We urge that executions not be resumed under any circumstances, and that instead real solutions to violent crime, both short and long term, be identified and pursued.

60 Signatories of academics, lawyers, doctors and activists