

Socio-political and Cultural Dimensions of Reconciliation

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Professors Dilanthy Amaratunga and Richard Haigh were the invited speakers at the International Conference on Socio-political and Cultural Dimensions of Reconciliation in Sri Lanka was held on 6th May 2016 at Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka. The Association of Sri Lankan Sociologists and Sri Lanka Foundation Institute organised the conference.



Photos: top and bottom – Prof Richard Haigh presenting his research



Richard's speech was on International Conference on Socio-political and Cultural Dimensions of Reconciliation in Sri Lanka to be held on 6th and 7th May 2016 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, while Dilanthy spoke about Managing housing needs in post conflict housing reconstruction.



Photo: Prof. Dilanthy Amaratunga speaking at the conference

As a society emerging from three decades of conflict that polarized its people, Sri Lanka today is in a critical juncture to reunite its fragmented communities. Reconciliation or re-building relationships that were severely antagonized during a conflict however is not an easy task. It requires a holistic approach that is sensitive and acceptable by all communities regardless of how the conflict ended. It needs to facilitate healing at both individual, community and national levels so that there is a lasting closure to the discordant past. More fundamentally, reconciliation needs to acknowledge and address the root causes of the conflict to prevent a relapse. The recognition of multiple causes will help not only to dispel misconceptions regarding the causation of the conflict but also find effective ways to remove or neutralize such causes. Reconciliation thus is a complex process which requires genuine commitment to promote harmonious relationships among the fractured communities.



Photo : Prof. Siri Hettige, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Police Commission (far left) – Conference Chair

In this context, Sri Lanka's effort to promote reconciliation after the conflict ended has been rather slow and sporadic. The state's response to reconciliation is primarily based on facilitating economic development and social integration through various programmes aimed at specific segments of society. Civil society's engagements have revolved around the needs of the conflict-affected communities in grappling with rebuilding their lives. The state-appointed Commission on the missing persons has been sitting in various parts of the former conflict areas to collect information on those who disappeared during the conflict. Whether all these efforts promote reconciliation in Sri Lanka needs to be discussed from a broader understanding of what is meant by reconciliation, and questions such as, what is the need for reconciliation? Can reconciliation be achieved, or merely promoted? What are the factors that encourage reconciliation? How is reconciliation followed-up? need to be asked and discussed in a constructive manner for the benefit of the larger society. This conference provided a platform for meaningful and relevant discussions on reconciliation in Sri Lanka. More specifically, the conference aims to bring to the public sphere a dialogue on the challenges of reconciliation in post-conflict Sri Lanka.

The conference also provided an excellent platform for academics, practitioners, policy planners and other interested scholars to discuss their research and ideas on reconciliation in Sri Lanka under the sub-themes of education, language issues, religion and culture, employment policy, youth identity, regional development, state structure and national reconciliation, and national policy on reconciliation. The policy brief resulting from the discussion will be circulated to relevant and interested institutions for further discussions and appropriate responses by way of policy formulation programme follow up by relevant state and non-state agencies.

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