

**Building Back:****Sri Lanka post-war reconstruction can connect communities: expert**

July 18, 2011 (LBO) - Post-war reconstruction in Sri Lanka can be used to connect communities divided by decades of war, an international expert on construction who is studying the island's experience said.

"Infrastructure can actually connect and at the same time divide people," said Dilanthi Amaratunga, an expert from the Centre for Disaster Resilience, University of Salford, UK.

"We need to use reconstruction to connect communities," said Amaratunga who is doing a study into the impact of infrastructure reconstruction programmes on social cohesion among conflict affected communities.

"We can use the reconstruction process to promote peace such as by giving the communities a say in the reconstruction process," she told LBO.

Post-disaster periods provide a window of opportunity which countries can take advantage of to address a lot of disaster issues, said Richard Haigh, also from the University of Salford, which is organising an international conference on building resilience to disasters in the island this week.

"The political will is available and there's a chance to build back in a more resilient way."

Sri Lanka's experiences in reconstruction after the end of its ethnic war and a tsunami will be studied at the three-day conference, starting July 19, along with the experiences of other countries like floods in Australia and earthquakes and Japan and New Zealand.

The conference is expected to draw over 65 international and 45 Sri Lankan academics, practitioners, professionals and policy makers concerned with disaster risk reduction and development of sustainable communities.

"Resilience building is the only option we have to cope with natural disasters which cannot be avoided," said Dakshitha Thalgodapitiya, Secretary General of the Chamber of Construction Industry which is helping to host the conference.

"Building resilience is the only way to minimise damage with earthquakes, tsunamis and floods that we experience," he told a news conference.

