

NONVIOLENT BUDDHIST PROBLEM-SOLVING IN SRI LANKA

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As a Sri Lankan, it gives me pain of mind to speak on the subject of peacemaking in Sri Lanka. It is more painful when this subject has to be discussed in the Buddhist context. When Sri Lanka was Buddhist, both in precept and practice, there was no need to talk about peacemaking because there was no fundamental value crisis in the Sri Lankan society in spite of internally or externally caused strife and power struggles, which sometimes led to bloody rebellions and wars. Peace prevailed in the minds of the general public and their communities because the generally accepted value system remained unattacked by contending groups.

It is common knowledge that there is a disturbed situation in Sri Lanka today where legalised structural violence prevails and extra-legal violent methods are used as well to resolve conflicts. Some call it an "ethnic problem." Some others call it a "terrorist problem." Yet others call it a "militant struggle for liberation." There are still other groups trying to identify it with a more simplistic description, calling it a kind of war between the Sinhala Buddhist majority and the Tamil Hindu minority. Whatever it is, there is violence and counter-violence which has

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already taken a toll of several thousand lives, most of them innocent and powerless people who could not comprehend what was going on around them.

There are various kinds of scholarly papers written on this issue. Some of them trace the problem back to the Aryan Dravidian origins of the Sinhala and Tamil races. Others have taken great pains to prove who inhabited the island first. Human rights have been discussed in great detail. Dialogues and negotiations have been going on for several years with militant groups at the level of political parties and governments. There is hardly anything useful that can be achieved by adding to those writings and peace formulae--additions may even create more confusion in the minds of the people. In spite of all this, not only the people who have taken up arms--those with declared legitimacy on the part of the government and extra-legally on the part of the militants--but large numbers of innocent men, women and children get killed, become disabled for life, lose their houses and property, become destitute and suffer untold agony.

What is most needed seems not to be highly academic peace plans, full of minute legal details, but a down to earth approach within the reach of ordinary citizens of the country. As a non-academic, I agreed to speak on this subject because it is in such a layman's exercise that I am involved, with others, through the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, at the moment. Most people feel that Sarvodaya is "Buddhist thinking" in development action. Also, the Sarvodaya efforts can be described as peacemaking in Sri Lanka in the Buddhist context. As I am qualified to talk only about what I am directly involved in, I will confine myself to Sarvodaya efforts in peacemaking.

Before I proceed any further, I would like to make certain preliminary remarks about Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Statistically seventy percent of the people in Sri Lanka are said to profess Buddhism. There is hardly any place in the country where an

ancient or modern Buddhist monument or monastery is not found. There are around twenty thousand monks attending to the religious needs of people today. Religious ceremonies and related activities are going on continuously. The teachings of the Buddha in its most pristine form is found in *Dhamma* texts. Even non-Buddhist laymen and politicians liberally quote chapter and verse from the Buddha's Words in their public utterances. When one sees and hears all this, one gets the impression, or I would say, the illusion, that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country.

To my mind, to call Sri Lanka a Buddhist country and then to put the blame for every kind of immoral act or incident of violence or denial of human rights on Buddhists is not fair. Even though historically and culturally Sri Lanka may claim to be Buddhist, in my opinion, certainly the way political and economic structures are instituted and managed today can hardly be called Buddhist either in precept or practice.

Let me have a look at the political structure. It is based on the so-called party system which has been adopted from the west. Political parties *in practice* promote, what is called in Buddhism the four defilements, namely, *chanda*, *dvesha*, *bhaya* and *moha*. By *chanda* we mean the bringing about of alienation between one another in the minds of the people. The existing caste, linguistic, racial, communal or other differences are surreptitiously and sometimes openly used by political parties to promote their own self-interest, instead of promoting compassion and the idea of well-being of all in the minds of people. Therefore, the political parties hold a notorious record for promoting alienation among the people of Sri Lanka.

Dvesha is ill will, which is the direct result of the aforementioned alienation. Organised gossip, rumour, falsehood and so on supplement various kinds of apparently democratic, political and economic propaganda, carried out by most of the

leaders of political parties. While the political elite may have a common understanding of the game they play according to their own rules, the unwary ordinary people fall prey to their machinations and develop longstanding enmities and irreconcilable conflicts. This explains the origin of a lot of the violent confrontations we witness in Sri Lanka today.

The third characteristic, *bhaya*, is mutual fear. In post-independent Sri Lanka while an unjust, unhealthy and a borrowed party political system was kept going for the benefit of a small class of people, to whatever party they belonged to, mutual suspicion and fear among common people also kept gathering momentum. The so-called 1983 "communal" violence was promoted by a handful of politically powerful people who were in a microscopic minority. Yet, they were able to rouse this spirit of mutual fear in most people and they kept them away from any constructive intervention to prevent the escalation of that violence.

Of course there was a negative kind of intervention on the part of some educated people, interventions in the form of scholarly analyses based on a hoard of statistical data and historical facts. I call this mostly negative intervention because they did not affect in any way the thinking of either the man on the street or our basic political and economic structure that promoted the situation of disharmony and conflict. In other words, philosophising that does not touch the basic roots of mental defilements and social realities resulting from them, in Buddhist terminology, is simply called *moha* or ignorance. When ignorance becomes organised, and one calls it social science, it is a disaster for communities who have a right to expect more positive interventions from the more educated sectors. We see a situation today in Sri Lanka of different groups holding onto their own uncompromising positions while the sound of guns and explosions continue to be heard.

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The economic goals, structures and processes that are officially promoted also are not, in my opinion, conducive to building peace in a Buddhist way. Promoting consumerism is one extreme which Lord Buddha rejected as *Kamasukhallikanuyoga*. Since independence the country has been drawing away from the Middle Path. Four hundred and fifty years of western influence and rule, the deliberate promotion of the materialistic way of life and the existence of a small elite group who have achieved that affluent level, have made the general population also aspire to achieve material prosperity as their sole aim in life. But few succeed. Most end up in a situation worse than they were in before. With the introduction of the so-called free economy during the last ten years and with plenty of imported consumer goods floating around, everyone is bent on making quick money to acquire these non-essentials. Malnutrition is on the increase; crime is on the increase; the cost of living is skyrocketing and bribery and corruption have taken unprecedented proportions.

When any kind of social unrest sets in, there are small gangs of undisciplined people who take advantage of the situation. These are mostly teenagers who have had no proper schooling or education in cultural values. But the media has conditioned their minds to desire various material things. They go on a rampage of looting and arson at the slightest opportunity. This is what happened in July 1983 in many places in Sri Lanka. Some young people looted television sets from shops and only after taking them home to their shanty dwellings did they realise that they had neither electricity nor a place to keep them in. Then they smashed them on the ground. This kind of psychological reaction is a clear example of the frustrations developed in people who see a consumerist society around them, but are denied the opportunities to be a part of it.

So the economic environment is not conducive to the mental peace and contentment of individuals and communities

when it is supported by a vicious power-oriented political system. In a Buddhist society, neither political nor economic activities promoted by the state should contradict the teachings of the Buddha. Furthermore, in both these fields of human activity there are teachings that can guide a state dedicated to following the teachings of the Buddha. Primarily a Buddhist has to abstain from killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying and consuming intoxicants. When all five injunctions are formally promoted directly or indirectly by the state it is far from building a Buddhist economy. When speaking of economic development, Lord Buddha not only stressed the importance of increased efficiency in production (*Uttana Sampada*), but also the importance of the protection of resources and the environment (*Arakkha Sampada*), a friendly social milieu in which economic activities should take place (*Kalyana Mittata*) and a wholesome lifestyle towards which all the economic activities are directed (*Sama Jeevakata*).

Production and consumption do not constitute the totality of life and society. They are the material foundation on which higher objectives pertaining to human life and culture are to be attained. The way in which production, distribution, consumption, technology, and marketing are carried out determines whether these higher objectives are promoted or hampered. The economy in Sri Lanka makes it very difficult to realise these higher aspirations. The lack of a spiritual balance is resulting in widespread ecological and environmental problems which in turn affect the thinking and conduct of human beings.

The Sarvodaya approach to peacemaking is twofold. Firstly, the movement tries to re-establish a value system while also promoting technologies and structures that would lead to a sustainable society. Secondly, the Movement addresses itself to the problems that need immediate attention even though their origin is in the present arrangement of the political, economic and social structure of our society. The latter programme is

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something like bringing relief, rehabilitation and reconciliation to people who have been affected by violence. The former is an attempt to remove the causes that have brought about the present state of unrest.

Having outlined the political and economic processes which are officially promoted, one can understand how difficult it is to promote alternative processes within the law which would lead to a social order of Buddhist values and objectives. In this case study of peacemaking in Sri Lanka in the Buddhist context, taking the experience of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, I am attempting to describe how the programme has been implemented during the last three decades. Firstly, I will give a brief description of the overall approach we have to change in the system. Secondly, I will describe specific actions we have taken up, especially those which redress damage already done by various eruptions of violence caused by economic, political and social factors.

Sarvodaya is a Buddhist concept. It literally means the "awakening of all." Shramadana means, "sharing of one's time, thought and effort." Sarvodaya thought and Shramadana action form the foundation upon which the movement was begun.

The Buddha's admonition that human beings desirous of putting an end to the painful cycle of births and deaths should try to realise the illusion of "ego" and try to transcend selfishness constitutes the essence of Sarvodaya thought. In practice, this amounts to selfless service towards fellow beings irrespective of their caste, class, creed, race and other divisive categories. That which is easiest to part with or share with others are one's thoughts and efforts. So, the Sarvodaya activities begin with Shramadana camps where men, women and children in communities share their labour to satisfy various needs of communities.

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In Buddhist philosophy four principles of social conduct are advocated. They are *dana* (sharing), *priya vacana* (constructive speech), *arthacharya* (constructive activity) and *samanathmatha* (equality). In a Shramadana camp, these four principles are always kept in the forefront and practiced. For peacemaking the psychosocial benefits of a camp are often more important than its physical achievements. The participants in these camps come from many different sociopolitical backgrounds and after going through the Shramadana camp experience they usually leave with barriers overcome and a feeling of being one with humanity.

Today there are over eight thousand villages out of a total of over twenty-three thousand villages in Sri Lanka where this kind of experience is shared by thousands of people attending regular Shramadana camps. In 1986, 3910 Shramadana Camps were held, totalling 314,412 human-days of work. We call this psychological infrastructure building. Peacemaking on a national level is inconceivable without all the people in the country coming together on a psychological level.

I should even venture on to call such a process spiritual infrastructure building. In a Buddhist society, loving kindness, compassion and respect for life are given highest priority. As children we were not allowed to harass, harm or kill even a small living insect like a mosquito. In the Karaniya Metta Sutta, the Buddha teaches the importance of extending loving kindness towards all beings. A friendly mental energy is irradiated from the minds of people who live in a cultural milieu in which respect for all life is an accepted principle. In such a spiritual climate, the language spoken to one another becomes pleasant and inter-personal relationships become constructive, affectionate, selfless and nonviolent. However, as I mentioned before, modern society suppresses this kind of spiritual relationship through economic and political competitiveness. This competitiveness is systematised and organised under

various eye-catching, tantalizing slogans. Therefore, the building of psychosocial and spiritual infrastructures also must be systematised and organised. Otherwise it is not possible to counteract the purely materialistic forces.

Perhaps it is appropriate to mention here briefly the technique of community meditation that the members of the Sarvodaya Movement practice. It has five steps. Firstly, relaxing of the body with the mind; secondly, maintaining attention at the tip of the nostrils while observing the breathing in and out; thirdly, expressing loving kindness towards one's body and mind and progressively extending it towards the near and dear ones and then to all others including the ones who are disliked; fourthly, attempting to link up with other human beings and those who live in other planes of existence who practice similar forms of universal loving kindness; fifthly, directing all the thought energies towards a form of conscious willingness for justice and world peace.

The rationale behind the first step is for the individual to be conscious that his or her mind and body always function together. The second step helps one to conserve mental energy by keeping other thoughts from coming. The third step multiplies these conserved thought energies and the fourth step universalises them. In the fifth step this universal energy is collectively irradiated out towards all living beings and specifically towards the peace and well-being of the human family.

While an unseen spiritual infrastructure is systematically laid in this manner, it is also necessary to organise people of all age groups into social formations. This is done by helping village communities to get organised into children, mothers, youths, farmers, and other groups. Leaders for all these groups are trained in Sarvodaya institutions so that they learn the art and science of satisfying their material and spiritual needs.

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The satisfaction of one's needs should be clearly differentiated from the gratification of one's greed. Needs can be satisfied but greed is insatiable. Therefore, in a Buddhist society, it is essential that a sustainable and simple lifestyle is encouraged and held in high social esteem. Without resorting to wrong livelihood, it is possible in most instances to maintain such a lifestyle with locally available resources. Self-reliance and community projects can play a vital role in achieving such needs. A clean and beautiful environment and ecological balance can be maintained. A clean and adequate supply of water, clothing, simple housing, primary health care, energy needs, communication facilities and so on, can all be achieved easily in such a system.

Education regarding methods of satisfying needs takes place in all group activities. Spiritual and cultural needs of different groups can also be satisfied, leading to the strengthening of unity and harmony among all people. The Sarvodaya Movement has succeeded in breaking social and political barriers by bringing the temple, kovil, mosque and the church together and making them all centres for the promotion of common spiritual values. In this way unity in diversity becomes a living reality. Therefore, in the Sarvodaya approaches, rather than sermonising and philosophising, people experience the joy of living collectively. Perhaps the steadfastness with which most Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities stand together peacefully in most parts of the country despite irresponsible rabble rousing by the media and demagogues is due to the silent work done by these simple grassroots communities influenced by Sarvodaya thought and action.

The organisational infrastructure building or networking of these communities, lateral and vertical, must also be achieved. As many as sixty-five different specialised services such as nutrition; healthcare; village technology; communicable disease control; protection and enhancement of the environment;

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evolution of decision making process; economic enterprises including production, marketing and distribution and so on have been developed in a manner conducive to building friendship and cooperation rather than rivalry and competition among the aforementioned groups. This integrated approach helps to create positive societal peace while also helping to mitigate the underlying causes of disharmony and violence.

Now let me specify the contribution Sarvodaya has made to containing and repairing damage, whatever the causes may have been. Towards the latter part of the 1950s and subsequently on several occasions up to 1983, whenever communal violence erupted in a localised or more general way, the Sarvodaya workers, depending on their numbers, distribution and strength at those times, came forward fearlessly. They organised relief, rehabilitation and reconciliation programmes.

The most violent incident ever occurred in July 1983. Within twenty-four hours, Sarvodaya went into action facing all the risks involved in the general atmosphere of insanity. There were no organisations nor leaders, official or otherwise, who had the courage to publicly condemn the violence and to call for sanity during the critical days following the violence, except for the leadership of the Sarvodaya Movement. It was with their open commitment amidst threats from extremists that they opened the first refugee camps for affected Tamils, encouraged and supported government ministries to come out and help the victims, and even toured the whole country including the North and the East to render relief and to appeal for sanity so that further escalation of violence could be prevented. This commitment and sacrifice would never have been possible if it were not for the wholistic approach that the Movement had been building during the preceding two and a half decades.

The two months that followed the July 1983 violence was a tense period and even the best of friends among Sinhalese and

Tamils abstained from openly mixing together. But Sarvodaya workers in all parts of the country openly went about their work together without any racial difficulties and they contributed in an immeasurable manner to allay the mutual fears. In August itself, at the Sarvodaya headquarters, the first public meeting on the communal violence to be covered by the media was held. This was followed by a historic conference held on the first and second of October 1983 at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo. Attending were nearly two thousand civic leaders of all races, including dignitaries of all religions including the Mahanayakes of all Buddhist Sects. A historic document titled "A People's Declaration for Mutual Peace and Harmony" was discussed and adopted unanimously. All present became signatories to this document.

This twenty-page Declaration was the first public document that highlighted the symptoms of the general degeneration in the Sri Lankan society, the causes of this degeneration and the way of removing the causes of this degeneration, and general and specific recommendations for action by various groups. This entire document was written following the Buddhist principles and using the Buddha's approach to problems, namely, the Four Noble Truths--(1) there is suffering (*dukkha*), (2) there is a cause that brings about suffering (*samudha*), (3) this cause can be removed (*nirodha*), and (4) there is a path leading to the removal of suffering (*marga*). It is significant that this Declaration was published in full in all leading Sinhala, Tamil and English newspapers. Its publication was followed by action programmes several months before the local and expatriating Sri Lankan scholars started writing their voluminous theoretical treatises and the political parties started their all-party deliberations.

The "Symptoms of General Degeneration in the Sri Lankan Society" were highlighted in the Declaration as follows:

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While we accept the fact that the Stability, Peace and Progress of a Society rests on the degree of understanding, respect and adherence on the part of its members, to its Value System upon which the Spiritual, Moral, Cultural, Social, Economic and Political sectors of that society are based, and the honour paid and the adherence attached to it by the members, and that our Society showed a gradual degeneration in all these sectors during the post World War II era, and that, the resulting decadence reached its climax in July, erupting into criminal incidents with possible political and/or communal overtones of a very serious nature and having realised that these incidents have shattered the very foundation of our social fabric, revealing,

Firstly, the existence of a number of groupings in our Society, numerically very small, but yet very powerful, who neither pay any heed to, nor observe, what we as cultured people have commonly upheld for thousands of years, as Good and Evil, Moral and Immoral, Right and Wrong, Just and Unjust, Fair and Foul, Human and Inhuman, and that,

Secondly, their solution to Political, Economic, Social or any other problem, is beyond the realms of the accepted Law of the Land, being conceived only through violence and thuggery, and that,

Thirdly, they pay not even the scantiest respect to life, human or other, and that,

Fourthly, they derive immense mental satisfaction (consciously or unconsciously) by destroying private and public property, and that,

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Fifthly, in their midst, even religious leaders, the custodians of Value Systems in our Society have become ineffective, and that,

Sixthly, some politicians and others, who wielding more of wealth, power and position, guided by narrow political and economic gains, shield and protect these lawless elements, ignoring the damage and destruction they cause to established norms, human lives and the nation as a whole, and that,

Seventhly, the efficiency and power of the Police to safeguard Law and Order in such a situation have been weakened, and that,

Eighthly, even the Law Courts and Prisons, administering and enforcing Law, have become unsafe, and that,

Ninthly, the discipline and morale of the Police and the Armed Forces to make their presence felt in the event of a national calamity, whatever the cause may be, have deteriorated, and that,

Tenthly, respectful and law abiding citizens have feelings of doubt and fear to stand up and generate and provide People's Power essential for the protection of the Value System and the enforcement of Law and Order, in the event of these lawless elements taking over, disrespecting Value Systems and violating the State Law, and that,

Eleventhly, the Political Leaders, the strongest section in Modern Society, have failed

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to provide an undivided, united leadership to the people even during a serious national calamity, and that,

Twelfthly, as a result of all these, even foreign powers have begun to show undue concern in our internal problems, causing a threat to National sovereignty, we have come to be aware that an understanding of these symptoms of common degeneration evident in all communities living in our country, be they Sinhala, Tamil, Moor, Malay, Burgher or any other, is of utmost importance at this moment of crisis.

Similarly, the "Causes of Degeneration" were analysed under the following headings:

Destruction of the value system;
Discrepancy in the educational system;
Loss of the sense of fear and shame attached to the violation of law and social norms;
Weakening of community leadership;
Interference with state services by external forces; and
Creation of a wrong life style.

Next, it promulgated the following action programme as the way of removing the causes of degeneration:

1. Steps should be taken to give leadership to the Buddhist public to refashion their social, economic and political life on the spiritual, moral and cultural values as traditionally laid down under the leadership of the Maha Sangha.
2. A Buddhist-Hindu Brotherhood Promotion Programme should be launched on the

initiatives of the Sinhala Buddhist community, owing to the sole reason that it is the Tamil-Hindu population that has won world sympathy as victims of various crimes.

3. Leaders of all religions, as all religions are intrinsically messages of peace and brotherhood, should unite and exert themselves in the forefront in an attempt at inculcating a sense of respect for moral laws.
4. Special attention has to be focussed on Tamil and other communities living in majority Sinhala areas, in order to accept them and protect them in brotherhood, respecting and assisting to nurture their language and culture.
5. Special attention has to be focussed on Sinhala and other communities living in majority Tamil areas in order to accept them and protect them in brotherhood, respecting and assisting to nurture their language and culture.
6. Immediate investigations have to be made into violations or denials of Human Rights of any community in any part of the country, politically, socially, economically, culturally, or administratively and those occurring due to the weakness of security services and to rectify them with the least delay in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka.
7. The present economic system and its processes have to be brought under review and an Economic Philosophy and process in keeping with the national requirements and values have

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to be thought out and implemented immediately.

8. The party and power oriented political system considered by most as the main cause of distrust, differences, sectarianism and other vicious obstacles operating in the present society should be replaced by an alternate democratic system of administration within the unitary frame of the State of Sri Lanka, capable of fostering mutual Confidence, Friendship, Brotherhood and Peace in which the common people can participate to a maximum.

This Declaration ended with a "Common Recommendation" and several special recommendations to be followed up by the Government, parties and other people's organisations.

Being convinced that people are fundamentally in favour of peace and justice and of reconciliation through mutual understanding, a peace walk was organised from the southernmost tip of the island to the northern extremity, passing through important towns--in order to evoke the deeper humaneness of the people and to provide an opportunity for it to be expressed in an explicit and healing manner--as one of the recommendations included in the Declaration. However, it is pathetic that the peace walk had to be indefinitely postponed at the end of its third day. After the completion of inter-religious ceremonies the participants had proceeded for barely fifteen miles when the march was called off. And this followed the visit of His Excellency, the President of Sri Lanka, who went down to meet the historic ten thousand-strong group which he called the "pilgrimage from one human heart to another human heart." Yet, even though this long peace walk was postponed, the Sarvodaya activities in the fields of relief, rehabilitation and reconciliation at the level of village communities continues to

this day. In different parts of the country, especially in tense areas, limited peace walks ranging from six miles to thirty-six miles were made with the participation of people ranging in numbers from two thousand to thirty thousand.

The massive programme that was thus set in motion is still underway. Undaunted, committed bands of peace promoters are as active as ever. Whatever language we may speak and wherever we may live on this planet, we are all beings of one and the same family. The supreme power that humans possess is the power to think and to develop his mind along the lines of peace. The Sarvodaya Shanti Sena (Peace Brigades) Division which aims at national harmony and cooperation has engaged in many an experiment. One important project is to involve a Sinhala youth from the South, male or female, with a Tamil youth from the North in community service for a period of three months in the village of one of them and to repeat the experiment in the other's village. Here, while they learn each other's language, customs and habits, they also grasp their needs. These first meetings often lead to further opportunities to exchange their views with mutual understanding. As a result, whatever grave conflicts arise among others in the country, these young men and women never contribute to the damage. Rather, they strengthen links in the cause of mutual understanding. Amidst grave risks, dangers and threats they courageously continue to this day to serve according to their means, protecting lives, making available relief services, and succoring to the afflicted and arresting the sowing of the seeds of hatred. This type of reconciliation is already an accomplished fact in the areas in the turbulent North, where thousands of families have been resettled with Sarvodaya initiative.

Realising the gravity of the current situation and convinced of the inadequacy of piecemeal remedies administered by diverse groups, Sarvodaya has drawn up its latest programme for peacemaking in Sri Lanka--the "People's Peace Offensive." This

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provocatively titled project is described as an "Humane Approach towards Solving the National Problem."

The People's Peace Offensive, consisting of organised groups of peace loving people, actively intervenes in situations of armed conflict. These courageous people confront violence with nonviolence at the risk of their lives and force the conflicting parties to resolve their problems without resorting to further violence. It is called an "Offensive" because it works with all the spiritual, moral, cultural, economic and familial forces available against violence, and its starting point is human suffering.

The veracity and relevance of the pronouncement made by Gauthama the Buddha, the spiritual mentor of our country, that "suffering is the first noble truth and greed is the root cause of suffering," has been revealed in the trials and tribulations of Sri Lanka today. Armed conflict is suffering; damage to life and property is suffering; to part with loved ones is suffering; life in refugee camps is suffering and death under violent circumstances is suffering.

From the statements made by the government leaders two alternatives seem to be discernible to them viz: (a) a negotiated political statement and, (b) an all out military solution.

The people of Sri Lanka have begun to realise that it would be folly to depend exclusively on a political solution. Even if a political solution is reached, in the implementation stage it might collapse and the situation would be worse than before. The masses are also aware of the unprecedented holocaust that can result from a military offensive. They realise that militancy is certainly not a constructive path to spiritual, moral, cultural, economic and familial transcendence for the Tamil or Sinhala people. Clearly, there is much urgency for a new approach of a different sort altogether.

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The need at this moment is for a third alternative to be initiated by a non-communal, nonviolent people's force, the starting point of which should be the alleviation of the conditions of those who are already undergoing suffering and to prevent further escalations of violence that will lead to increased suffering in more and more people. The actions of such a People's Peace Offensive will be direct and humane, will uphold peace and justice for all and will soften the hearts of both sides to stop violence and to pave the way towards a peaceful settlement. The People's Peace Offensive was launched in the beginning of 1987 to meet these needs.

To achieve the general objectives of the People's Peace Offensive, which are enumerated as twelve in the Document, five general principles have been adopted viz:

To be guided by Truth and Nonviolence;

To function above all sectarian considerations of race, religion, language, caste and party politics;

To alleviate suffering of victims of all forms of violence as a priority action;

To suffer even death in the execution of one's duties to bring peace and justice to affected people; and

To be independent, impartial and universal in all PPO actions.

Already the general public and governmental and militant leaders are aware of the following twenty-point action programme. Steps are being taken to implement it.

1. Motivation, organisation and training of PPO groups.

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2. Identification and programme formulation of priority areas.
3. Education for Peace and Justice in non-priority areas.
4. Resource mobilization and Logistical support.
5. Progressive despatch of PPO groups to priority areas.
6. Dialogues with government and militant leaders, both in the North and East and India.
7. Exchange of community leaders and dialogues between North, East and Southern areas.
8. Exchange of and dialogues with peace leaders between Sri Lanka and India, and also with other world peace leaders.
9. Development of a Communication Support System for the PPO.
10. Extension of the Peace Zones and progressive demilitarisation of further areas leading to a total cease-fire by mutual and sustainable negotiations between the government armed services and the militants.
11. Release of all detainees by persuading the government to agree to hand them over to PPO committees for rehabilitation into normal familial and community life.
12. Comprehensive assessment of loss of lives, livestock, livelihood, house and property, etc. in Peace Zone areas as well as other areas where relief and rehabilitation work has started

and launching a resuscitation programme including the giving of compensation.

13. Negotiate with the government and militants and assist them to reach an agreement to normalise civilian transport services between "Militant-"controlled areas and the rest of the country.
14. Negotiate with the government and the militants and assist them to reach an agreement to normalise the functioning of educational institutions so that children can get back to their usual routine.
15. Similarly, assist to reach an agreement on hospital and health services and resuscitation of other public utility services.
16. Organisation of mass participation and peace education programmes throughout the country such as peace meditation, peace poojas, peace pilgrimages, peace camps, peace processions, peace marches, peace seminars, meetings and conferences and remove from the minds, especially of Sinhala and Tamil people, any fears, suspicions and distrust left over from the unfortunate happenings in the past.
17. Keep the international welfare, development aid and peace organisations informed of the PPO and its progress and solicit their cooperation, both moral and material to realise its objectives.
18. As the spiritual, moral, cultural, economic and familial infrastructure is progressively laid, at the appropriate time play a final mediatory role

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between the government and the militant forces, to get both to agree to an international peacekeeping force (to be invited by the government) if necessary when total disarmament is achieved and an elected civilian rule under whatever decentralised political institutions, is re-established.

19. Initiation of programmes for the return and rehabilitation of refugees in India and other countries with the assistance of the Sri Lankan government and other governments and non-governmental organisations.
20. Assisting the militants and armed services personnel to revert back to civilian life, whenever necessary.

One last comment. Peacemaking is a never-ending process that spiritually motivated people both individually and in groups should pursue relentlessly. It is more difficult to make peace than to break peace. For both, resources are needed. In an unjust social, political and economic world order it is easier to get resources for peace-breaking than for peacemaking. Thus it is imperative that all people of spiritual worth and goodwill contribute in their small way to a global effort of peacemaking. The most important benefit such people should expect is the development of their own spiritual well-being, leading to peace within themselves and their own environments.