

Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka

Mission Statement The Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka aims to promote the conditions for an end to the civil war and for a lasting peace in Sri Lanka. We will do this through supporting the Irish government and the European Union in their efforts to foster peace and human rights in Sri Lanka. We will help civil society groups in Sri Lanka working on behalf of peace and human rights in whatever way we can. We will also encourage Irish non-governmental organisations (human rights, development and peace) to contribute to the peace process in Sri Lanka.

Statement of Objectives

The civil war in Sri Lanka between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is one of the most protracted conflicts in South Asia. The LTTE has been engaged in armed conflict with the Sri Lankan security forces for an independent homeland in the north and the east of Sri Lanka, Tamil Eelam, since 1983. The conflict has claimed more than 70,000 lives and displaced more than 1.2 million people. The ceasefire agreement that was signed by the two parties in 2002, facilitated by the Norwegian government, brought hope to the people of Sri Lanka, especially those who had been living in refugee camps in the north and east of the island, in some cases for decades.

The ceasefire agreement opened the democratic space for negotiations based on equality, diversity, interdependence and the peaceful resolution of the conflict. A commitment to these principles is an essential prerequisite to any successful peace process in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka was badly affected by the tsunami of December 26, 2004. This included areas controlled by both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka. The Joint Mechanism created by the two parties to distribute the funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the affected areas was an opportunity to strengthen the peace process, but it was suspended for legal and political reasons.

The LTTE was banned as a terrorist organisation by the European Union in November 2006, and this has also served to undermine the peace process. The current President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse, was elected in 2006 with the support of political parties opposed to the ceasefire agreement. There have been more than 5,000 deaths and 300,000 civilians have been displaced following the EU ban against the LTTE and renewed military operations by the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE. More than 1,000 disappearances have been recorded within government controlled territory.

Repression has been employed against trade unionists, journalists and publishers, local and international NGO workers, human rights activists and business people. Some journalists, human rights activists and aid workers have been killed, while others have been abducted or detained without charge. International human rights organisations (such as the International Commission of Jurists) have expressed concern about the current human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

Protecting fundamental human rights and democracy are a priority for the peace process to be restored in Sri Lanka. Ireland can play a vital role in helping to create the democratic space that is needed for peace in Sri Lanka, because of the historical experience of the Irish peace process and our membership of the EU. The Norwegian government, which has played a vital role in the Sri Lankan peace process, has the active support of the EU.

In particular, the Irish government and the EU must do two things to help restore the peace process in Sri Lanka. Firstly, they must promote open dialogue based on mutual respect and equal treatment between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The experience of the Irish peace process shows that only such a dialogue, based on mutual recognition and parity of esteem, can produce a negotiated settlement and a lasting peace. As a first step, this requires an immediate end to the EU ban of the LTTE.

Secondly, the Irish government and the EU must actively support the protection of fundamental human rights in Sri Lanka. This is especially important in a situation where supporting peace is equated with aiding terrorism. The Government of Sri Lanka has a special responsibility in this area, as a signatory to international human rights treaties and conventions.

The international community, including the Irish government and the EU, can play a vital role and have a significant positive impact at this crucial juncture in the peace process in Sri Lanka, through supporting human rights and a return to peaceful negotiations. We call upon the Irish government and the EU in particular to rise to this challenge, on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka and civilians affected by armed conflict everywhere.

Fr. Alec Reid – A peacebroker who successfully worked for the ceasefire agreements in Northern Ireland and is now working in the Basque region in Spain for peace efforts. He was awarded the Sabino Arana 2002 “World

Mirror” prize, in recognition of his efforts at promoting peace and reconciliation.

Senator Ivana Bacik - She is the Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College Dublin (previously held by Mary Robinson and President Mary McAleese). She is a Senior Lecturer and also a Fellow of Trinity College (elected in 2005), and a practising barrister.

Denis Halliday - The former UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Iraq. He resigned from the post of director of the Oil for Food Programme as a mark of protest against the sanctions imposed on the people of Iraq. Now he works as an international peace campaigner against military interventions.

Prof. John D’Arcy May – Associate Professor of Interfaith Dialogue, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin. International Advisor, Society for Buddhist - Christian Studies.

Dr. Geraldine Smyth – Senior Lecturer in Ecumenical Studies, Trinity College Dublin. She holds the Chair of the International Advisory Group of INCORE, a joint programme of UN University in Tokyo and Ulster Univeristy that combines research, education and comparative analysis on conflict and reconciliation, nationally and internationally.

Dr. Iain Atack – Programme Co-ordinator of International Peace Studies, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin. He visits Sri Lanka regularly both as a researcher and as a peace worker.

Dr. Johnston McMaster – Programme Co-ordinator of Education for Reconciliation in Northern Ireland, Irish School of Ecumenics, Belfast. He holds the Chair of the Northern Ireland Youth Service Curriculum and Policy Development for Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (JEDI). He has started visiting Sri Lanka for workshops on peace and reconciliation.

Ciaran Fitzpatrick – A campaigner for peace, human rights and the protection of environment, Drogheda, Ireland

Jenny Haughton - Artistic Director of Artworking and lecturer in strategic arts management at the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dublin. She is presently Chair of Alternatives to Violence (AVP) Ireland, and a member of the Dublin Peace Committee.

Moya Loughnane – A campaigner for peace and human rights, Galway, Ireland. She visits Sri Lanka and works with the grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.

Brian Maguire – A visual artist and member of Aosdana who has represented Ireland internationally. He is currently Professor of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. He is a painter who has exercised an engaged, cross-cultural practice in closed communities, including jails and mental institutions, throughout Ireland and abroad. His exhibitions have been held in some major cities in Europe and the United States.

John Robinson – A doctoral researcher, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin. He holds the Chair of European Youth Council for Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

Sean O’Boyle - A teacher, a youth worker and a development worker in Ireland and Britain. He is also involved in number of community development projects in Sri Lanka.

Sr. Rita Minehan – A Brigidine sister and a writer on Celtic spirituality and a board member of Action from Ireland (Afri).

Joe Murray – Co-ordinator, Action from Ireland (Afri), Dublin. Afri seeks to promote debate and influence policy and practice in Ireland and internationally on human rights, peace and justice issues. In particular, Afri responds to injustice in the world caused by war and other violent conflict.

Dr. Tom Hyland – Founder of the East Timor Ireland Solidarity Campaign (ETISC). An international campaigner for the rights of the people of East Timor and a board member of Action from Ireland (Afri).

Barbara O’Shea – A writer, lecturer and a campaigner for human rights and peace issues. She is also a board member of Action from Ireland (Afri).

Dr.Andy Storey – A lecturer in the Development Studies Programme at University College, Dublin. He has researched the Rwandan genocide and is also a board member of Action from Ireland (Afri).

Donal O’Brien – A board member of Action from Ireland (Afri).

Mary Lawlor – Director, Front Line—The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

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