



## Contributing to a Sustainable Peace in Sri Lanka: The Sri Lanka Campaign's Strategic Plan (2016-2019)

### 1. Background

In the 5 month period between January and May 2009, it is estimated that between 40,000 – 90,000 civilians were killed in northern Sri Lanka. Most of these deaths were caused by the Sri Lankan Army as it sought to eliminate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) without regard for the impact on the civilian population. Various international bodies, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have concluded that such actions are likely to constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

To date no one has been held to account for these crimes, and that lack of accountability has engendered a culture of impunity in Sri Lanka which is leading to a continuation of the cycle of violence and abuse. While the tyrannical Rajapaksa regime was ousted from power in a surprise defeat in January 2015, unless the structural root causes of the problems Sri Lanka faces are addressed there will be no sustainable peace, and the lives of people in the north and east of the island will continue to be dominated by fear and oppression.

### 2. The role of the Sri Lanka Campaign

We are a global non-partisan movement that aims to:

- Achieve genuine reconciliation based on accountability for violations of international law
- Build respect for human rights and the rule of law
- Support efforts within Sri Lankan civil society to promote a just and lasting peace

We are not affiliated with any political or ethnic group inside or outside of Sri Lanka, and we exist to fight for the rights of all those living in Sri Lanka.

This Strategic Plan lays out the three-year strategic aims for the work of the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice (SLC) for the period 1 January 2016 to 1 January 2019. This will form the framework for SLC's work for the next three years, with international and in-country programme activities contributing to their achievement.

The three strategic aims for 2016-19 are:

**Strategic Aim 1:** to increase national and local civil society capacity to combat the culture of impunity in Sri Lanka by maintaining domestic pressure for accountability for war crimes and other human rights violations and for an improvement in Sri Lanka's human rights record.

**Strategic Aim 2:** to support Sri Lankan war survivors in shaping the process of transitional justice in Sri Lanka and to build awareness among war affected communities of their rights,

options, and chances with respect to engaging with it.

**Strategic Aim 3:** to ensure that the international community meets its obligations (laid out in the OISL report and resolution A/HRC/30/L.29) to effectively monitor progress on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and, where necessary, to take further action to ensure that it is achieved.

Together, these aims seek to contribute to the development of a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka, in which non-recurrence is safeguarded through the upholding of justice and human rights.

### **3. The rationale for arriving at priorities and objectives**

In identifying the priorities the following factors have been taken into account.

#### **3.1 Internal discussions and research**

This included internal discussion within SLC, reflection on previous strategies and external priorities, and critical evaluation of SLC's previous work and past success.

#### **3.2 Consultation with partners and stakeholders within Sri Lanka**

This process has started with informal discussions with colleagues and civil society activists over the second half of 2015.

Initially, a short five-question survey was used as the basis for semi-structured conversations with seven Sri Lankan civil society activists representing a range of different kinds of activism and backgrounds.

This resulted in the creation of a draft strategic plan which was sent to various trusted partners in Sri Lanka via email and discussed in person by our Campaign Director in the course of a visit to Sri Lanka. In total detailed discussions were had with 37 individuals and organizations in Colombo, Negombo, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, and Mannar districts.

Methodology varied according to the setting. In some cases a formal questionnaire was used, in others informal discussions were held. In the majority of instances the questionnaire was used as a framework for a semi-structured conversation with detailed notes being taken.

#### **3.3 SLC's added value**

Careful consideration was given to what SLC can contribute to peace and justice agenda over and above the work being undertaken by others, and how SLC, through its work, can more effectively influence the agendas of other stakeholders with greater capacity and reach.

In the discussion about the Sri Lanka Campaign's added value in our 2011 Strategic Plan it was noted that while several organisations were multi-ethnic and non-partisan, or worked exclusively on Sri Lanka, or were able to successfully engage with the media and the public, no other organisation seemed to be able to balance these three different approaches without one aspect of the three suffering.

This is still broadly the case, but the external space in which we operate has become more crowded. More actors have entered the scene, and international human rights organisations

have increased the intensity of their Sri Lanka work and focussed more intensively on their engagement with the public.

#### 4. Findings of the consultation process

##### 4.1 The continuing need for a Sri Lanka Campaign

The question “is the Sri Lanka Campaign still needed” was met with a unanimous and resounding yes. In some cases it was met with laughter that the question had been asked. Furthermore, the closer to survivor communities in the north and east of Sri Lanka the respondent was, the more persistent the respondent was as to the continuing need for a Sri Lanka Campaign.

Key quote: “Still needed? Ha! Your campaigns are the only thing that have ever made a difference.”

Specific reasons given for the ongoing need for a campaign were:

- SLC fill a niche unlike any other campaigning group.
- Despite our limited size SLC campaigns have demonstrated greater impact and value than others.
- The issues SLC campaigns on are under reported, and more emphasis is needed on them, not less.
- For SLC to wind down now would send the wrong message. It would add to the perception that the situation in Sri Lanka has improved to the point where human rights issues are no longer pressing, which does not reflect the reality of Sri Lanka, particularly in the north and east.
- Many Sri Lankan civil society activists, particularly in the north and east, are increasingly pessimistic of the willingness of the Government of Sri Lanka to act unless pressured and influenced by the UN and other Governments. This is something where the SLC’s international contacts and proven influence leave us well placed to act.

Key quote: “You are the only people that can pressure the Government. You have to go on.”

It should also be noted that while the political context in Sri Lanka has changed considerably in many ways, it is still a long way from fully reformed and there is a significant amount of continuity between the old regime and the new. Furthermore, structural and cultural changes are still needed in order to ensure that the reforms of the past year are substantive and enduring. All this means that the observed changes in the north and east of Sri Lanka must be viewed with great caution, and that it will take at least a full electoral cycle – during which structural reforms will need to be made – before we can say with confidence that the situation in Sri Lanka is improving.

##### 3.2 Changes in public space in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan civil society is now more skilled, more vocal, and more able to access public space than it was in 2011. For a long time Sri Lankan civil society activists, particularly those close to survivor groups, felt that many issues were too difficult for them to raise, and they asked us to serve as interlocutors. This is still partly true, but it is less so.

However, both domestic and international organisations continue to face challenges when it comes to working directly with survivor groups. These challenges are outlined in this table:

	<b>Challenges working with survivors</b>	<b>Challenges bringing survivors' stories to an international audience</b>
<b>International organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty of access.</li> <li>• Risk that the relationship is seen as one sided and exploitative.</li> <li>• Lack of control local actors feel over the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The international community are less likely to see the work of an international organisation as being authentically from Sri Lanka.</li> </ul>
<b>Domestic organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues of race and class.</li> <li>• Different political agendas.</li> <li>• Risk that survivors are (or are seen as) instrumentalised.</li> <li>• Internal civil society politics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is still harder for domestic organisations to access international public space.</li> </ul>

This is further complicated by “gatekeeper and ownership” politics within Sri Lanka, a subject upon which we expand below.

Therefore what is needed is an organisation that is sufficiently proximate to Sri Lankan civil society to work with survivors as closely as possible, but which still is seen as being external and independent enough to reap some of the benefits international organisations enjoy and to avoid some of the challenges that domestic organisations face.

**Key quote:**  
 “Without you challenging them we can’t do anything.”

In initial discussions with Sri Lankan civil society the following additional issues emerged:

- It was felt that a continued international campaign was sorely needed as fear and a lack of access still mean that it is very hard for domestic organisations to say and do the things that SLC does. Ongoing UN involvement, and various international leverage points, such as the discussion over “GSP+” trade status, means that an international campaign remains a key lever for influence.
- It was felt that a particular SLC strength is our ability to shine a light onto more obscure, or less ‘fashionable’, issues. Our tea, tourism and “Free Jeyakumary” campaigns were singled out for praise. We are seen as the only organisation running public advocacy campaigns on such issues.

More detailed discussions within Sri Lanka cemented the idea that “campaigning” is the most valuable service that we offer and the reasons given for that were as follows:

- We are almost alone in being a public advocacy organisation working exclusively on Sri Lankan issues. Yet public interest in Sri Lanka, as seen during CHOGM, and as a consequence of Channel 4’s documentaries, has been a major motivating factor in shaping its human rights landscape.
- Campaigns generate international pressure, and international pressure generates space for Sri Lankan civil society.
- Campaigns make complex and poorly understood ideas more accessible and easier to comprehend. Campaigns provide a mechanism for understanding the underlying issues.

**Key quote:**  
 “Lack of pressure from the West makes us feel vulnerable.”

- Campaigns shift the balance of advocacy from theoretical questions and questions of human rights law to questions of how the day-to-day lives of ordinary individuals are affected and how to respond. They also shift advocacy priorities and move them closer to the interests of the communities most at risk.

Running campaigns is therefore clearly going to remain a key part of what we do and how we work. It was strongly suggested that we should run campaigns with the following objectives:

- Maintaining the interest and involvement of the international community at this crucial time.
- Shining a light onto the less well known aspects of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.
- Promoting solidarity with Sri Lankan civil society.
- Making complex technical issues, such as transitional justice, more comprehensible and accessible.

Key quote:  
“Very good important campaigns”

### 3.3 Priority areas

In the course of consultations the following issues were mentioned with respect to SLC’s priority areas:

- While transitional justice is clearly a hugely important issue, many felt there was a danger that other aspects of human rights in Sri Lanka risked being overlooked at the expense of transitional justice.
- It was however strongly felt that monitoring the implementation of Government commitments, and ensuring that the international community holds the Government of Sri Lanka to account, should be major priorities.
- Demilitarisation was mentioned as one of the primary areas in which it was thought our public advocacy campaigns could have impact. It was suggested that looking at demilitarisation through the prism of land seizures and the military’s involvement in the economy would increase the likelihood of impact.
- Demilitarisation and continued CID surveillance were mentioned as the two most immediate and pressing examples of the kind of security sector reform where SLC and international pressure was felt to be vital in opening up space for Sri Lankan civil society.

Key quote: “We don’t lack knowledge and understanding [of transitional justice], we lack interest. That is because we are not yet ready [there is not a conducive atmosphere].”

Key quote:  
“You do geopolitics – we’d rather not!”

- SLC’s ability to react and respond to new initiatives and events was cited as being a significant area of added value. For this reason it was requested that we not create too restrictive a workplan.
  - Opinions strongly differed about the extent to which a process of education and capacity building with respect to what transitional justice was needed. Many groups were very keen that we provide technical support and capacity building and in particular that we provide simple, easy to understand, guides to the key issues. Others however felt that this work was in hand, and that, as it is largely a question of language and communication, it was in any case better left to Sri Lankan NGOs.
- Witness protection, on-going torture, the repeal of the PTA, and the use of Sri Lankan troops for UN Peacekeeping missions were also brought up as potential priority areas.

### **3.7 A time-limited or a permanent campaign?**

The Sri Lanka Campaign was always intended to be a time-limited response to the human rights crisis that followed the end of military action. It was never intended to be a permanent campaign. However, as it became clear that the problems we were seeking to address were long-term and structural, it also became clear that SLC needed to evolve into a campaign with long-term sustainability.

It is clear, and it has been confirmed by our consultations, that there is a continuing need for the SLC, and thus we are developing a plan to ensure sustainability into 2019 at the earliest. Indeed because processes of reform in Sri Lanka are so tightly tied to electoral cycles it may be that 2021 is the earliest SLC might contemplate winding down.

However, it is too early to say if and whether the SLC will still be needed beyond this point. This should be determined by both independent and internal analysis and evaluation to take place in 2018 at the earliest.

That said, throughout this document, and throughout our work, we have looked carefully to ensure that we are not engendering dependency through our work. Indeed our objective is to increase capacity within Sri Lanka to carry out this work.

## **4 Strategic Aims**

### **4.1 Strategic Aim 1**

To increase national and local civil society capacity to combat the culture of impunity in Sri Lanka by maintaining domestic pressure for accountability for war crimes and other human rights violations and for an improvement in Sri Lanka's human rights record.

#### **4.1.1 SLC's response so far**

Our regular campaigns on human rights issues have attracted the positive feedback and support by Sri Lankans and Sri Lankan and international civil society. As referenced earlier in the paper we have a proven track record of success.

We intend to build upon this work by translating this international pressure into domestic pressure through an analysis of the Government of Sri Lanka's pressure points.

In the long term, this approach aims to phase out the need for international interventions by transferring skills and knowledge to those directly and indirectly affected by human rights abuses. In the shorter term, it will allow SLC to deliver change for national constituencies.

#### **4.1.2 Expected outcomes by 2019**

A significant impact on Sri Lankan lives caused by improved human rights outcomes as a result of this process.

A decrease in egregious violations by the security forces against Sri Lankans linked to an erosion in the culture of impunity it currently enjoys.

### **4.2 Strategic Aim 2**

To support Sri Lankan war survivors in shaping the process of transitional justice in Sri

Lanka and to build awareness among war affected communities of their rights, options, and chances with respect to engaging with it.

#### **4.2.1 SLC's response so far**

In 2015 the Sri Lanka Campaign produced a ground breaking report "How Can We Have Peace?" which sought to put survivors' voices at the heart of the accountability process. This has also been the focus of the SLC's campaign from March-October 2015.

The Sri Lanka Campaign have had great success in the past in supporting capacity and communications. Our infographics, which have been reproduced widely across Sri Lankan advocacy, media and diplomatic circles, are a particularly strong example of this. More generally speaking the SLC is lauded for its ability to explain complex issues in clear and accessible terms, and so allow more people to engage with them.

#### **4.2.2 Expected outcomes by 2019**

Stronger and more effective responses by the UN, other international bodies and second governments on issue of transitional justice.

Survivors are able to identify and understand mechanisms for redress and have the tools and knowledge to engage with them.

SLC links with Sinhalese civil society groups increased to the extent that work similar to that which is currently being done with Tamil and Muslim communities can be done with Sinhalese and other communities.

Signs of increasing trust between communities based on a meaningful process of reconciliation.

### **4.3 Strategic Aim 3**

To ensure that the international community meets its obligations (laid out in the OISL report and resolution A/HRC/30/L.29), to effectively monitor progress on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, and, where necessary, to take further action to ensure that it is achieved.

#### **4.3.1 SLC's response so far**

The Sri Lanka Campaign has been at the forefront of the campaign for accountability in supporting the international investigative process through three Human Rights Council resolutions and via support for the implementation of the OISL's recommendations in full.

Monitoring has been a traditional area of weakness for UN mechanisms in Sri Lanka. SLC has led the way in making up for this shortfall with our work using a "traffic light" scheme to monitor the implementation of the Government of Sri Lanka's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) commitments and our infographics highlighting the mismatch between the recommendations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and the Government's own commitments.

#### **4.3.2 Expected outcomes by 2019**

Fair and thorough monitoring of the transitional justice process by SLC contributes to a more thorough understanding of the nature of human rights issues in Sri Lanka, and areas which need to be addressed.

Stronger and more effective responses by the UN, other international bodies and other governments on issues of accountability.

Prosecutions, either domestic or international, against prominent human rights violators in Sri Lanka.