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Transforming Conflict in a Developing Nation: Challenges and Opportunities

Project Goals

- ◆ Study the impact of a prolonged, violent, and ethnic conflict on individuals and the entire nation
- ◆ Learn about and evaluate the current peace process as a political and social force
- ◆ Understand the work and daily operations of a conflict resolution and peace-building non-governmental organization (NGO)

Personal Goals

- ◆ Adapt to an entirely foreign culture
- ◆ Explore the cultural differences between my native culture and Sri Lankan culture
- ◆ Develop personal relationships beyond the workplace

Activities

- ◆ Attended conferences and seminars on the Ceasefire Agreement and Peace Process
- ◆ Authored and edited Peace Council publications, including a proposal for a Peace Journalism training program
- ◆ Toured rural areas with the Sewa Lanka Foundation

Key Dilemmas

- ◆ How can an NGO be effective when it lacks human and material resources as well as a strong infrastructure to keep programs and personnel organized?
- ◆ Even with English as a common language, the immense language and cultural barrier prevented a fuller integration into Sri Lankan society, and therefore restricted my contribution to the organizations.
- ◆ How can I have a positive and meaningful impact on an organization or its efforts, in such a limited amount of time?

*Focus D-100:
advertising June
3 photo exhibit
commemorating
100 days of
ceasefire*



The quintessential image of Sri Lanka: meeting of east and west, old and new, traditional and modern, in a bull pulling a cart with an oil barrel. Note the Pepsi billboard as well.



Sri Lanka

Important Learnings

- ◆ Public trust and media support are necessary for building a peace movement.
- ◆ The challenges of political corruption and power imbalances in Sri Lanka are immense.
- ◆ Peace must be achieved both at the government and grassroots levels.



Left– *Rickety shacks along the canal around the corner from my house at the edge of Colombo: Being in the city means even these haphazard houses have electricity.*

Below– *Young Buddhist monks: Boys often enter the monastic order at a very young age to escape poverty at home.*



Drinking king coconut water, a refreshing tropical drink

Background: Traditional wooden hand carved mask

I heard a speaker make the point that the average Sri Lankan living outside of the conflict areas has seen more images of war and destruction from Sept 11, the Middle East, and African conflicts, than in his/her own country. So I see the underlying ethnic tension issue as really the most fundamental question at hand, without any easy answers. Yet people here are all too willing to blame everything on politicians and then expect them to fix it, too. They see democracy as something that happens TO them, not FOR them and, more importantly, BY them. Everyone talks about politics and writes editorials and such, but the direct pressure just isn't there. Another big challenge and dynamic in the conflict transformation process is the need to increase democratic participation, inform people to make their own educated decisions and find solutions on their own. Power devolution and a new constitution are also really important in that respect.



Modeling a sari, the customary South Asian dress, in my host family's indoor garden, before a wedding

Background— Batik mandala/moonstone tapestry: traditional image symbolizing the Buddhist and Hindu stages of reincarnation until reaching nirvana (paradise, the end of the cycle of rebirths) in the center