

North East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation

(NEIFR)

**‘Enabling an environment for Reconciliation among
Communities in Sri Lanka’: position of the North
East Interfaith Forum**

Submission by the NEIFR to the LLRC

1st Of December 2010

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The Chairman, distinguished members of the LLRC, and our well wishers gathered in this hall permit us, on behalf of the North East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation, to begin by thanking everyone of you and, in particular, this commission for giving us an opportunity to make a submission. Importance of this commission and the influence it is going to have on shaping the future of this country is evident, as President Rajapaksa, based on an interim report from this commission has already directed implementation of some recommendations for change.

1. Inter-ethnic divide

Our motherland, Sri Lanka, once considered the pearl of the Indian Ocean and icon for confluence of multi-religions and relative peace over hundreds of years, suddenly succumbed to a precipitation of conscious inter-ethnic polarization. Real and assumed socio-cultural, political, economic, ecological, territorial, and psychological differences are constantly sharpened to perpetuate the divide between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. As a result, the country suffered a violent war for over three decades. In a country which historically had sharp divisions

and hostility between the low country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese, the Sinhala-Tamil divide as bitter enemies is relatively a recent phenomenon. The Sinhala – Tamil divide that began with the categorization of people on ethnic terms during the colonial times, had unfortunately persisted even after independence, and today, in the hands of politicians, ethnic characterization has emotionally strengthened as a powerful weapon to mobilize people in exclusive groups for gaining political power.

2. Will everyone accept that all Sri Lankans are equal?

We learn from authentic records that *Homo sapiens* have inhabited this country for thousands of years, and they were the ones who periodically had embraced and imbibed whenever external influences and ideas reached the shores of this island. Therefore, which ethnic group came first and where it took residence on this island seems irrelevant particularly if we are serious in our resolve to pave a path for national reconciliation. In our books initiating reconciliation should begin by breaking down any historically-rooted identity perceptions of one's supremacy for imposing a particular ethno-social construction, and instead, the reconciliation should follow a process of

recognizing other ethnic constructions as equals and necessary integral components for rebuilding this nation. We believe that only fear of a group's identity and culture being assimilated by another and discriminative allocation of economic opportunity and resources to an assumed supremacy will continue to be a major problem against reaching the full measure of reconciliation.

3. Moving beyond conflict

Majority of the Sri Lankans are thankful that the past 18 months have been the peaceful time after many years of uncertainty and restraints on free movement but, no one wants to believe that it is going to last. What we are now looking for are mechanisms to convert this temporary peace to a more lasting one so that, miseries of all parties can end and mutual trust restored for everyone in this country to share the space and resources and live in harmony with the rest.

It is widely acknowledged that truth, justice, mercy, and peace are essential components of reconciliation. Of these, mercy is an attribute that culminates in forgiveness. Therefore, it has a theological connotation which, we believe, cannot grow out of political resolutions or constitutional amendments. We in this

country are fortunate with a rich heritage of all major religions, and our views and aspirations are largely shaped by respective religious beliefs. At times when all these facets are entangled and manifest in conflicts they cannot be untangled only through considerations with narrow political interests. Only strategies for engaging people emotionally and culturally will help, and therefore, search for such strategies will be equally important to complement all other reconciliation efforts.

The Acehnese proverb "...there is always a time for the rain to stop and there is always a time for war to end..." inspired us to foresee the end of the war in Sri Lanka which prompted us to ask - are the people of this country prepared for moving beyond the conflict? Once the guns went silent we anticipated greater challenges for re-stitching the war torn social fabric so that, once again, everyone can amicably share the common space and resources. This led us to a major conference titled "Spirituality as a resource for reconciliation and reconstruction" in December 2008 at the BMICH



Conference – ‘Beyond Conflict 2008’ Participants at BMICH

After two days of intensive debate the conference adopted a position that in any country conflict resolutions should address issues of ethnic diversity, equity and justice, accountability and people's security and safety. The conference also recommended that spirituality and common human values founded and strengthened by the different religious teachings should be used as a force to promote inter-ethnic understanding and social cohesion. In this context 'spirituality' was accepted as "the ability to recognise among the diverse doctrines a common space and substance from which can emerge a shared vision to trigger action for uniting humanity". Compassion is the glue to keep humans as individuals and communities, thus, it ensures care and safety of everyone without endangering the rights of all other living beings in their respective domains. Since this conference, volunteers have come together from different religious backgrounds throughout the country under an umbrella calling it People Accelerating Towards Human Synergy (PATHS) and, at regular intervals, they have convened multi-religious and multi-cultural awareness programmes to adopt common societal values and plans for caring of public goods. Realising that reconciliation should be a post-war priority, some PATHS members in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces have

constituted, under the same umbrella, the North East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation (NEIFFR) and we are happy to represent this Forum today before this commission.



Religious Leaders in Consultation on 13-14th October

4. Space for tracking problems

We acknowledge that historically, and in the contemporary world, religion in many instances have been used as a factor to provoke violence. We are also aware that under globalization and modernization, traditional societal values have come under increasing threats, and their combined impact has weakened people's spirituality and adherence to faith-based guidelines for righteous living. However, religion and religious consciousness, in far too many instances, have also played a vital role in achieving peace. Thus, there is an urgent need for a relook and to understand the religious dynamics from every source that can be brought into play to diffuse or solve any given conflict situation. We believe that not everyone is necessarily bad and, at times, those who are bad have also some streak of goodness in them. People's outlook and behaviours, particularly in this part of the world, are influenced by religious values and upbringing. We are convinced that between every stimulus (bad or good) and response (bad or good) there is a space and, in this space, lies freedom for influencing or altering someone's behavior. This space, we believe, is an opportunity for appeal through transcendental aspects of religious convictions for mercy and

forgiveness. It is to this opportunity that we need to reach out for negotiating solutions to ‘intractable’ problems.

5. Role for religious leaders

We strongly believe that understanding the dynamics of various doctrines and by applying their harmonizing principles to post-conflict situations the process of reconciliation can benefit. Therefore, we believe that the religious leaders and institutions on all sides are best equipped to take this on. However, we are in no way under estimating the challenges for using religion and the leaders of the respective religions as instruments of peace and reconciliation, particularly in the current situation of our country in which religious persuasions such as concern for the neighbour, betterment of humanity, and respecting laws of nature for preserving it from wanton destruction etc are overtaken by confrontational power politics of intolerance, divisiveness, and resistance to change.

6. Faith based diplomacy

Today, in most policy calculus of the conflict ridden world importance of religion as a conflict solver is resurfacing.

However, we believe that faith-based diplomacy to succeed, the following conditions should be ensured:

- Conscious commitment to respect and abide by spiritual principles and preparedness also to use prayer, fasting and forgiveness as resources of peacemaking.
- Reliance on a certain spiritual authority sustained by a supporting legitimacy, either tied to an institution or through trust based on a personal spiritual charisma.
- Faith-based diplomats to have firm rooting in a particular religious tradition, and they should also understand and respect the essence of other faith traditions.
- Conviction that transcendental approaches and principles are derived from sacred texts and spiritual experience to conflict resolution adds value to other human logic diplomatic efforts. Therefore, there is a need to institute and preserve this combined approach to reconciliation efforts against all odds.

We believe that the above conditions cannot be achieved just by encouraging dialogue of some religious leaders as what some government and non-governmental agencies do nowadays. There needs to be conscious government effort to involve the people at the ground level to create those conditions. These conditions can only develop through uninhibited interactions of individuals and communities of different faiths intended to increase mutual understanding and respect for diversity in approaches to common problems.

7. Spirituality and reconciliation

Peace in the sense of absence of war is of little value to someone who is gripped in poverty. Therefore, we believe that all post-reconstruction efforts in terms of macro level infrastructures are crucial, but they need to be people-centered with the sole objective of making them self-reliant, and reconciliation efforts should go hand in hand with the reconstruction efforts. This is where the religious leaders have an obligation to bring in a sense of moral authority for restoring societal relationships that were severed by war and dislocation and to inculcate virtues of co-existence based on human dignity and commitment as shareholders in protecting the integrity of this country.

In the journey towards reconciliation the victims demonstrate a spiritual mastery to forgive the unforgivable by restraining emotional impulses of revenge for ending hatred or bitterness in them. We believe that without forgiveness there can be no change and no real reconciliation. Experience suggests that for victims of mass violence, the desire to forgive arises through the powerful practices of community worship or inner contemplation. Forgiveness is an inward spiritual decision made by a victim to let go the burden of pain and hate, (and not necessarily to forget) and it helps to release heart-constricting grief and loss. Forgiveness therefore requires courage, commitment, and compassion. Every step in this passage entails deliberation and reflection, and it cannot be rushed or demanded by others. Forgiveness, which promises no exemption from punishment for the perpetrator, can remove a crippling burden of hatred carried by the victim. Nonetheless, as long as a grievance is allowed to fester in ones heart, reconciliation offer (-by anyone) may not be accepted although the one offering it can consider his/her actions genuine and justified. How many of us can take responsibility for grievances others hold against us, and show magnanimity to ward off temptations for claiming self-righteousness and accept responsibility for grievances of others?

It is such magnanimity that can lead to a genuine apology and win over the victims.

Some argue that a public statement “I’m sorry” by the political head of a country would do the trick and provide sufficient incentive for conflict victims to gravitate towards national reconciliation. Although this has significance, and needs to be done (and we as members of the NEIFR certainly wish to encourage it) an act of apology without repentance for whatever that caused the misery cannot lead the victims towards the path of forgiveness. Unfortunately, experience from other countries suggests that wherever assurance for reconciliation has been given by a (periodically changing) political authority it did not go very far among the embittered people. In environments where moral authority seems to have worked it was also backed up by:-

- Credibility as a trusted institution
- Demonstrable set of human values
- Uprightness for opposing injustice from anywhere even on the part of government
- Trust of all parties of conflict for mediation by the moral authority

- Skills to re-humanize situations that have become de-humanized over the course of protracted conflict through collective worship and assisting victims and perpetrators in internal reflections
- Ability to mobilize community support towards peace process; and
- Ability to follow through and enforce compliance to terms of settlement.

Unfortunately, as Sri Lankans, we have neither demanded nor helped to develop such moral credentials from any authority, and that has affected the religious leaders as a whole from being given the rightful place as peace and reconciliation diplomats in society.

8. What can be done?

We face two challenges for rebuilding this country. Immediately, efforts will have to be directed to transform the people affected by the prolonged war and make them valuable partners in the reconstruction of this country. The second challenge is to adopt a term of vision, strategies and commitment that will prevent resurgence of conflicts. Our political decision makers today are

less inclined to sacrifice comforts of ideologies attached to their present positions and serve the larger interest of the future. They are also shy of transparency and cultural sensitivity which are absolutely critical for credibility particularly among the war affected victims. Thus, the political decision are unlikely to be taken seriously when they make pronouncements seeking forgiveness and reconciliation which are far more emotional and liberating for both: those who forgive and for those who are forgiven to work together in partnership for rebuilding this country. We believe that it takes a spiritual courage to forgive an unforgivable deed and to rise above it without transferring the hate of any group that prevailed over the past years from reaching the next generation. Let us begin anew with the hope and determination to rebuild this nation.

8.1. Transforming the tattered & traumatized towards forgiveness:-The prolonged war displaced thousands of people particularly from the northern and eastern provinces. Except for a few who actively carried weapons others have been victims of coercion to comply with the secession ideology. The Tamil youth under 35 years, in particular in both provinces, missed out opportunities and have only been nurtured in propaganda for a divided Sri

Lanka. Although the internally displaced are gradually getting back to their original villages they are at a loss and need empathy and assistance through a source of solace to get them to the main stream. We therefore recommend that:-

- Spirituality and common human values founded and strengthened by different religious teachings be encouraged as source of comfort and hope for the troubled, and as a force to promote interethnic understanding and social cohesion. Thus, *formation of inter-faith groups need to be encouraged and given (financial and logistic) support to undertake the task of visiting IDP camps, resettlement areas, and to places where other war victims reside on a regular basis for consultation, counseling and assess gradual attitudinal transformation.*

8.2. **Prevention against conflict resurgence:** - Since independence divisive forces have worked their way to polarize people of this country ethnically and territorially. Conflicts start in the minds and hearts of people, and when people are insulated from the benefit of reasoning and free interaction prejudice overtakes and

communication breaks down. Sri Lanka is a victim of conflicts but, the opportunity now available for rebuilding it cannot be missed. Whether the country becomes peaceful and prosperous or slides back into much larger conflicts will depend on how effectively and sincerely the following principles are adhered to in governance and allow national reconciliation to take its course:-

- **Equity and justice:-** Guarding against the common tendency of misusing democracy after an election by allowing the majority to take all and marginalizing the minority (those that did not vote for the ruling party or ethnically under represented because of demographic numbers). Justice in terms of human rights, resource access and allocation is better understood through spiritual and faith traditions and therefore all future peace building efforts should be given the benefits from spiritual persuasions.

Consultation:-

Development decisions to be made on the basis of need and not greed, and people are taken into confidence in all decision making that affect their lives

- **Building trust:-** Eliminating political patronage and favoritism in deciding constitutional rights and administrative barriers and prejudices against free movement and social interactions
- **Holistic policies:-** Internalizing importance of both material and spiritual development and adopt policies that will help encourage both – material and spiritual- facets to develop side by side
- **Accountability:-** Making everyone accountable for his/her actions wherever they are either in the public or private sector
- **Strengthening Traditional values:-** Strengthening family and family values as safety net for care of the under previllaged.

We believe that reconciliation among estranged groups as a result of prolonged war and bitter conflict is difficult to achieve in a short term, and at once. It should therefore become part of the long term rebuilding exercise. To keep reconciliation in focus and anticipate potential breach of social harmony and diffuse

before it takes dangerous proportions an institutional arrangement will be required. Therefore we wish to make the following recommendations:-

- **Committee of conscience:** *Constitute (with the assistance of the people and without political patronage) a national committee of conscience rooted in spiritual guidelines of right to life, share of common space and resources. This will be the apex body to advise governments on human rights, resource access and allocation, ethical harnessing of natural resources and also function as advocates for safety of endowments passed down to the next generation. This committee will also advise desirable changes to educational systems to include spiritual teachings of human and family values and monitor divisionary and extremist publication or pronouncements that might compromise societal cohesion and incite divisions among the people.*
- **Reconciliation and peace committees:-** *The role of Justice of Peace in this country to be streamlined and constituted into formal committees of maximum 9*

members including leaders from the different religions at the district and pradeshiya saba levels. These committees will be linked to the committee of conscience and also hold regular meetings, seminars and workshop involving public servants and general public as ways of strengthening inter-ethnic relationship for peaceful coexistence with a focus on a common Sri Lankan identity.

- *Community steering force: - Everyone in this country has an equal stake in creating an environment in which human values and right to life will be respected as the basic platform to rebuild a peaceful society. We recommend this to be done by encouraging formation of a community councils (composed of vocational interest sector based elected representatives) at each village including two religious leader ex-officio steering members of the council as check in excesses of council members and prevent corruption of public servants and inculcate resource conservation as a spiritual requirement for posterity.*

- **Role Models :-** *The religious leaders should become role models and focal points for uprightness and forging peace and harmony in the society by providing incentives through recognition based on their humanitarian services and social transformation achieved.*

Conclusion:

In Sri Lanka we believe that mistakes have been made by all, and religious teachings of peace, respect to life and the need for everyone to individually and collectively establish harmony with nature to protect it from destruction has been deliberately allowed to evade us – the people- under the development strain of modernization and globalization. In spite of centuries of spiritual inheritance and its guidance for humanity to live in peace, our country as a whole has not derived the full benefits from those values to prevent or to arrest breach of communal harmony. The religious leaders also have a share of the blame. These are the major lessons we have learnt.

What Sri Lanka needs today is a reorientation, not to reverse the ongoing structural changes that are attributed to globalization but, to ensure that benefits derived from pursuit of development

are morally and ethically correct and are fairly distributed for the betterment of the common man. We need a reorientation that can anticipate societal disharmony at any point in time and to keep open a stream of dialogue for transacting compromises. This is the basis for the work that the Northeast Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation has set out to do. We have presented our thoughts how we the – religious leaders- could become a vehicle in the long reconciliation process to bring together strained communities for rebuilding this country. The challenge for prevention of future conflicts is to muster the political will of the decision makers to capitalize on the common spiritual language that can rekindle mercy and forgiveness. Conciliation that can be brought in by religious leaders working together with understanding of common values from the fountains of their respective beliefs will be valuable in formal peace negotiations.

In conclusion we wish to say that:

In reconciling a great injury, Some injury is sure to remain.
What can be done to prevent this injury turning to festering
wound?

The sage does not blame others for the plight of the injured.
The person of virtue attends to the obligation to restore justice

through remorse and forgiveness;

The person without virtue attends to the exactions and extricate him from guilt for causing the injury; When the virtue less reign, the sage and virtuous bear the injury, and

When the sage and the virtuous prevail the virtue less reap benefits of their glory.



Consultation held in Mannar on 20th of November 2010



Participants to the session held on 20th of Nov 2010

Appendix 1:

Moving Beyond Conflict: Spirituality as a Resource for Reconciliation and Reconstruction: The Resolution

At the end of a conference titled “Moving beyond Conflict: Spirituality a Resource for Reconciliation and Reconstruction” co-hosted by the Congress of Religions, Sri Lanka, the Mahabhodi Society, Sri Lanka, The Methodist Church Sri Lanka, Hindu Priest Council, Sri Lanka, Peoples Acceleration Towards Peace (PATHS), Muslim Aid Sri Lanka and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Sri Lanka held at the BMICH on 16th & 17th December 2008 we, the participants, representing religious dignitaries, civil societies and different professions from various districts of the country submit that we are:-

- *Concerned* that the prolonged conflict has intensified militarily, and as a result, human suffering has increased in the country
- *Mindful* that mistrust and distrust between and within the different communities have increased, and there is a need to build bridges to regain trust between communities
- *Unsure* that talks between the parties in conflict and other peace efforts underway will yield results in the immediate future
- *Optimistic* that in the near future hostilities that has gripped this country will come to an end
- *Convinced* that Sri-Lanka is basically a spiritual country,
- *Concerned* that there is an absence of interfaith–spiritual principles in pursuit of addressing humanitarian issues
- *Inspired* by renewed confidence that interfaith consultations and spiritual values can contribute to healing injuries caused by ethnic conflicts

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Recognizing that conflict resolution in any country should address issues of ethnic diversity, equity and justice among people, accountability, people’s security and safety we have resolved that:-

1. **Spirituality** and common human values founded and strengthened by the different religious teachings should be used as a force to promote inter-ethnic understanding and social cohesion
2. **Justice** in terms of human rights, resource access and allocation is better understood through spiritual and faith traditions and should therefore form the guiding principles in all future efforts directed towards peace building
3. **Economic development** should be guided by spiritual values to ensure ethical harnessing of natural resources, minimizing wastage as a mandatory policy measure as endowments for the future generations
4. **Educational systems** should be restructured to also include spiritual teachings of human values to mobilize people into accountability and building self reliant communities
5. Providing **incentives** (through recognition based humanitarian services and social transformation) to enhance the role of religious leaders in the society as focal points for community mobilization and counseling is needed
6. Formation of **inter-faith leader groups** in every village and networks of such groups with a view of developing a common identity and maintaining peace and harmony should be encouraged
7. The religious leaders should become **role models** in the society
8. The religious leaders should play a more **proactive role** with the support of the people to check excesses and prevent corruption of public servants
9. The need of the hour is to **depoliticize** all aspects of social life

We recommend that these resolutions be given serious policy considerations and backed up with the following guiding principles if we are serious about resolving the conflict and moving beyond:

North East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation

**Title: Enabling an environment for Reconciliation
among Communities in Sri Lanka: position of the
North East Interfaith Forum**

Summary

We, representing Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam that constitute the North East Interfaith Forum (NEIFR) membership in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna Mullaitivu, Ampara and Anuradhapura districts participated in a two-day workshop on 13th and 14th October, 2010 at Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Centre (HKARTC) in Colombo 7. The workshop was themed **‘Spirituality as a resource for reconciliation and reconstruction; the role of religious leaders’**.

At the end of our meeting we adopted some positions for future work in the firm believe that policies that would ultimately be prescribed for reconciliation and of reconstruction would be acceptable to all citizens of this country. Our new positions have also added weight to the general premise we hold that, there is a significant role for respective religious leaders for re-establishing trust and confidence among the different communities which have drifted apart from each other as a result of three decades of conflict in the country. Our joint efforts can lead to “a new environment that ensures equality and justice towards freedom of thought and expression, upholds and protects individual and collective human rights and dignity of all to pursue life’s goals without fear and suspicion and contribute to nation development”.

Importance of meeting minds from different faiths was prompted by a conference in 2008 held at the BMICH titled “Moving beyond Conflict.....” Since then, recommendations from this conference have been the guidelines for our work on the ground, and these recommendations took into account that conflict resolutions in any country should address issues of ethnic

diversity, equity and justice among people, accountability, people's security and safety. These recommendations were:-

- **Spirituality** and common human values founded and strengthened by the different religious teachings should be used as a force to promote inter-ethnic understanding and social cohesion
- **Justice** in terms of human rights, resource access and allocation is better understood through spiritual and faith traditions and should therefore form the guiding principles in all future efforts directed towards peace building
- **Economic development** should be guided by spiritual values to ensure ethical harnessing of natural resources, minimizing wastage as a mandatory policy measure as endowments for the future generations
- **Educational systems** should be restructured to also include spiritual teachings of human values to mobilize people into accountability and building self reliant communities
- Providing **incentives** (through recognition based humanitarian services and social transformation) to

enhance the role of religious leaders in the society as focal points for community mobilization and counselling is needed

- Formation of **inter-faith leader groups** in every village and networks of such groups with a view of developing a common identity and maintaining peace and harmony should be encouraged
- The religious leaders should become **role models** in the society
- The religious leaders should play a more **proactive role** with the support of the people to check excesses and prevent corruption of public servants
- The need of the hour is to **depoliticise** all aspects of social life

Our recent HKARTC meeting reaffirmed these positions and strengthened our resolve to fashion an environment of trust and confidence for interethnic coexistence. Positions adopted by us at the end of the recent HLARTC meeting are as follows:-

1. We believe that reconciliation among groups, estranged as a result of prolonged war and bitter conflict, is difficult to achieve in a short term and, it should be

looked upon as a long process that involves everyone afflicted by the war directly or indirectly

2. We believe that unless there is willingness for attitudinal change of individuals and groups, to move from hurt-stalemate positions to common positions, reconciliation will be a distant goal.
3. We believe that reconciliation largely involves emotional, social and ethical adjustments, and therefore, appeals made through respective faith convictions have a greater chance of success for shaping human values and qualities for reconciliation. Thus, recourse to spirituality could lead to a desirable environment for attitudinal change.
4. We believe that rebuilding social relationships among estranged communities is a continuous process and needs to be relentlessly pursued.
5. We believe that preparing people towards common goals beneficial to everyone is an important process, and therefore, constant dialogue among the different communities needs encouragement.

6. We believe that magnanimity of a public apology from the seat of power and authority followed by structural adjustments to ensure fair play and justice for everyone will go a long way to heal wounds and evince forgiveness.
7. We believe that guarantees derived from the top policy making levels to uphold justice need to permeate down to the grassroots for regaining mutual trust and greater social interactions.
8. We believe that any independent reconciliation initiatives from the grassroots level should be encouraged, and given national prominence for replication across the country.
9. We believe that religious leaders can make significant contributions by appropriately packaging message of reconciliation to prevailing situations, and therefore, their assistance should be solicited in reconciliation efforts at all levels...
10. We believe that generally religious leaders are respected by the people around them, and therefore, they have a

moral obligation to assume a catalytic role in guiding the process of reconciliation.

11. We believe that globally, over the past few years, spirituality and faith guided value systems have weakened, and as a result, authority of the religious leaders in the community has eroded. Thus, the religious leaders need to be helped for self search and find ways to win back the confidence of the people.

12. We believe that everyone should equally take responsibility to create an environment in which spirituality, human values and right to life will be respected as the basic platform to rebuild a peaceful society

In Sri Lanka we believe that mistakes have been made by all, and religious teachings of peace, respect to life and the need for everyone to individually and collectively establish harmony with nature to protect it from destruction has been deliberately allowed to evade us – the people- under the development strain of modernization and globalization. In spite of centuries of spiritual inheritance and guidance for humanity to live in peace,

our country as a whole has not derived the full benefits from those values to prevent or to arrest breach of communal harmony. The religious leaders also have a share of the blame. These are the major lessons we have learnt.

What Sri Lanka needs today is a reorientation, not to reverse the ongoing structural changes that are attributed to globalization but, to ensure that benefits derived from pursuit of development are morally and ethically correct and are fairly distributed for the betterment of the common man. We need a reorientation that can anticipate societal disharmony and to keep open a stream of dialogue for transacting compromises. This is the basis for the work that the Northeast Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation has set out to do. Strategies we consider important for social engineering (among the different groups) that will contribute to the process of reconciliation will be the focus of our presentation. That is the reason for seeking an appointment before the commission.

The following religious leaders were chosen to represent the NEIFR to make this submission before the LLRC. :

1. Dr. Desabandu Monahara Kurukal – Representing Hinduism
2. Ven. Ranmuhthugala Sangarathana Thero - Buddhism
3. Rev. Thevakumar - Christianity
4. Moulavi U.L.M. Mohamed Mackie – Islam

Committee Members of the North East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation

- 1. Dr. Desabandu Manohara Kurukal – Representing Hinduism**
- 2. Ven. Ranmuhthugala Sangarathana Thero - Buddhism**
- 3. Rev. Thevakumar - Christianity**
- 4. Moulavi U.L.M. Mohamed Mackie – Islam**
- 5. Ven. Wimal Himi - Buddhism**
- 6. E.K.Mahedran – Hinduism**
- 7. Fr.Reginold Francis - Christianity**
- 8. As Sheik. Aiyooob Azmin– Islam**