My name is Anna Lo and I am a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. For those of you who are not familiar with political arrangements in the United Kingdom, the Northern Ireland Assembly, along with the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, is one of the devolved regional governments within the United Kingdom. These devolved legislatures have powers over all relevant internal issues such as health, education, job creation etc., with the UK retaining control over defence, foreign affairs and the bulk of fiscal policy.

I suppose what makes Northern Ireland notable, and the reason why I have been asked to speak, is that in the 1990s Northern Ireland emerged from a violent internal conflict between its two main communities.

On the surface of it the conflict stemmed initially from peaceful protest around the denial of full civil rights to
the minority community; however, this masked a much deeper cultural conflict between two ‘ethnic’ groups which spiralled into violence, resulting in the suspension of the Northern Ireland Parliament in 1972 and the imposition of Direct Rule from London. This mirrors the ethnic conflict that escalated into violence here in Sri Lanka between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils.

Although Northern Ireland’s “Troubles” date from the late 1960s the conflict is much older going back centuries and centring on identity, with a focus around religion and culture. One side is predominantly Roman Catholic with an Irish cultural identity and a desire to unite with the Irish Republic, while the other side is predominantly Protestant with a British cultural identity and a desire to remain within the United Kingdom. For the past number of centuries the Protestant British identity had the ascendancy as the majority.

I suppose I have an interesting perspective on the conflict in Northern Ireland as I arrived there from Hong Kong over 30 years ago and the party to which I belong, the Alliance, seeks to draw support from both sides in the conflict and advocates the end of division and segregation.

While Northern Ireland has put the worst of its conflict behind it there are still violent elements within our society which would take us back to the “Troubles”. As a
parliamentarian it is my job to make sure that structures and principles are put in place to prevent that happening.

The CPA has often involved itself in the role of bringing parliamentarians to consider issues around conflict resolution and peace-building, just as we are doing here today. In October 2010, under the auspices of the CPA and the World Bank Institute, fourteen parliamentarians representing eight Commonwealth parliaments in countries recently or currently affected by conflict, met in Vienna, Austria.

They highlighted the key role that parliamentarians can have in preventing conflict and in lasting peace-building. They stressed the need for improving democratic governance, particularly its oversight functions and systems for ensuring accountability by the executive, including the budget process and public sector financial management. They identified a number of principal causes of conflict including:

- Poverty;
- Abuses of the rule of law and the constitution;
- Effects of climate change;
- Tribal, ethnic and class differences;
- Inequitable distribution of the benefits of resource development along tribal, personal and family lines; and
- Corruption.
In the case of Northern Ireland I could point to issues around “abuses of the rule of law and the constitution” and “tribal” differences that precipitated “The Troubles”. For us this period was characterised by armed resistance against the security forces of the State and by the targeting of military, economic and civilian targets in Northern Ireland and in the mainland of the UK.

The parliamentarians in Vienna realised grievances have to be addressed before they erupt into conflict and, likewise in reducing tensions in post-conflict situations before violence breaks out again. They highlighted the need to enact laws that are: “...effective, fair, sufficient, appropriate and acceptable and which are implemented to sustain the nation rather than an individual government”.

Parliamentarians must leave their political bias at the door of the committee room or wherever when they scrutinise the actions of their executive. This is further strengthened by parliamentarians doing what we do naturally – meeting together, as we are here, to communicate and promote dialogue rather than conflict. Parliamentarians must cross borders to talk and always make the effort to avert violence bloodshed.

A number of current conflicts have their basis in the scramble to control natural resources, often oil. These
kinds of resource-based conflicts can be internal to a state or they can cross borders. In some cases they can escalate to an international level, particularly when the resources involved are in short supply.

As the Vienna group highlighted that parliamentarians must ensure that the budget process that they scrutinise applies revenues: “...in a fully transparent and equitable way to prevent and resolve grievances and conflicts.” They also stressed the importance of something that is always more difficult to achieve, that: “The executive must respect and listen to the views of the opposition no matter how small their numbers”.

In the case of Northern Ireland part of the conflict was based on the refusal to listen to and acknowledge the voice and rights of the minority community. This repeated refusal creates tensions that, with the right triggers, like firing on peaceful protests and not engaging in power-sharing can result in terrible, long-drawn out conflicts such as those seen in Northern Ireland, or here in Sri Lanka.

Although the Northern Ireland Executive is a power-sharing mandatory coalition comprising the five largest parties in the Assembly which encompass 104 of the 108 elected representatives, there is still a tendency for the two big parties to seek to have their way.
Open debates on policy goals and the establishment of effective institutions such as Ombudsman’s offices and human rights commissions can support the role of parliament in providing an inclusive government. These offices and an effective Public Accounts Committee are invaluable to properly investigate grievances and disputes and to stop them ballooning into conflict situations.

Discussion in Vienna identified that states heavily dependent on extractive industries, such as petroleum products and diamonds, have a higher likelihood of suffering from conflict. As the Vienna group noted, there are Commonwealth states such as Malaysia and Botswana have managed these issues for the benefit of their national development; however, for some states this natural resource wealth has been a curse and conflict has arisen through mismanagement and corruption. This, in turn, has led to conflict and, on occasion, secessionist rebellions in the areas where the resources are located.

The workshop at Vienna also looked at the issue of security and endorsed full parliamentary oversight of all security agencies, including private sector security forces, as good governance is vital in this sector.

Security proved a huge issue in Northern Ireland. During the conflict the state security forces were perceived to
support the majority community and became targets of paramilitary activity. It has taken us years to reach a stage where the minority community have felt sufficient faith in the police force to join it and not fear reprisals from their own people.

Indeed, it was only in April 2010, more than 10 years after devolved government was returned to Northern Ireland that policing and justice functions were devolved from London to the Assembly in Northern Ireland. I know that faith in policing is an issue for the minority community here in Sri Lanka and it is an issue that needs to be solved as violence can erupt if one community feels that justice and secure are the preserve of the “other side”.

Another key message coming out of Vienna was that the integrity of parliaments and parliamentarians must be above reproach. Transparency, through open committees meetings and the appropriate and timely declarations of interests is vital, as is the existence on internal and external bodies to monitor and assess the conduct of parliamentarians. In the Northern Ireland
Assembly we have sought to make the conduct of our business as open and transparent as possible.

Often there are huge political, economic and social challenges to be faced and a robust parliament with appropriate processes and willing parliamentarians is often all that stands in the way of a return to violence and conflict. The sectarian nature of the old Northern Ireland Parliament up to 1972 when it was dissolved and direct rule was imposed meant that the minority community felt that every aspect of the state was against it. This is a recipe for violence and must be guarded against at all costs.

It has been widely acknowledged that the most “successful” democratic and post-conflict transitions have been those where an attempt to been made to deal with the legacy of the past, such as the Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa.

The Vienna group also considered truth commissions. The group highlighted in its report that there should be a parliamentary debate on the desirability and feasibility of establishing a truth commission and if the decision is taken to proceed legislation to this effect must clearly set out:

- the commission’s mandate and objectives;
- its powers and rules of procedure;
- an inclusive and consultative selection process for the commissioners;
- a timeframe for completing its work;
- adequate funding;
- working relationships with other institutions and (transitional) mechanisms; and
- a follow-up mechanism to ensure the implementation of the commission’s recommendations.

However, truth also tends to be the arena in which the competing versions of history and the politics of memory play themselves out. In Northern Ireland we are still struggling with the “truth”. We have competing versions of “truth” and we have not yet arrived at a way to deal with the legacy of the past.

The Vienna group also considered the idea of reparations. This has been suggested in Northern Ireland, but it led to intense arguments about who should be classed as a “victim” of the conflict that the idea was not advanced. We struggle with the issue of a “hierarchy of victims”, with each side feeling that their casualties of the conflict have the greatest legitimacy to be classed as “victims”.
The Vienna group report highlighted some key principles in underpinning these processes to rebuild the state, post-conflict:

**Firstly, Make the most of ‘transitional moments’** – generally there is international good will and support for societies coming out of conflict and this can be capitalised on in terms of seeking support, material and logistical, for the establishment of a process for dealing with the past;

**Ensure real justice** – expediency should not be prioritised over thoroughness and judgments that will stand the test of time;

**Create realistic expectations** – the public’s expectations must be managed and ‘mob justice’ situations avoided. However the process to deal with the past in constituted it must stand up to scrutiny and have appropriate outcomes; and

**Ensure an effective package of transitional justice mechanisms** – it is important that courts, truth commissions etc. are compatible and that a properly choreographed timetable is agreed for the process of dealing with the past. This will help to avoid institutional and public confusion over the process.
The Vienna group also highlighted the vital role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the transitional process:

Parliament is the national debating chamber – hear the views of different groups and interests can be aired. Grievances and disputes can be highlighted and solutions discussed and agreed. Parliamentarians must engage with their constituencies so that the public’s views can be represented in the parliament. Parliamentarians also have a key role to play as opinion formers and leaders within the communities that elected them. However, in fragile societies parliamentarians play the partisan card at their peril; and

Parliament’s membership should truly reflective of society – solutions to issues are most likely to be endorsed by the public if they feel that their views were represented in the debate leading to the solution. This will not be the case if the parliament is not truly reflective of all components of the society. A sense of grievance can arise and the state can head back towards conflict and violence.

Sri Lanka too suffered from decades of intercommunal strife and violence. When the conflict ended in 2009 the government here set up a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, or LLRC. The Commission’s key areas of interest were:
• How to prevent a conflict such as this happening again;
• Whether any people, group or institution bears any responsibilities for the conflict; and
• Restorative justice – the steps that need to be taken to compensate or restore losses, whatever nature or form they may take.

The LLRC had made 285 recommendations; however, it has been criticised by international human rights groups due its limited mandate, alleged lack of independence and its failure to meet minimum international standards or offer protection to witnesses. Most of its members were retired senior government employees.

The experience in Northern Ireland is that such a body will only carry legitimacy and be listened to by the parties to the conflict if its membership is international and agreed by the former combatants. We frequently used Canadians in these roles, or high profile figures from other countries. This is one way that we, as parliamentarians, can help build lasting peace in post-conflict societies.

Without parliamentarians stepping up to the mark and creating a peace process, Northern Ireland would remain in conflict.

Thank you.
FURTHER BACKGROUND FOR THE WORKSHOP

SOURCE: Insight on Conflict (website) – a project launched by the UK charity Peace Direct

NORTHERN IRELAND
Northern Ireland was the location for an extended armed conflict, known locally as ‘the Troubles’, which lasted from 1969 until 1998 and led to the deaths of 3,600 people.

The conflict in Northern Ireland has been driven by conflict over the political status of the region and the competing claims and aspirations of the two main communities. The Protestant community generally favours the political union with Great Britain. They regard themselves as British citizens and define themselves politically as
Unionists. Hardline unionists are known as Loyalists since they proclaim loyalty to the British monarchy. The Catholic community generally favours the creation of a single united Irish state. They regard themselves as Irish people and define themselves politically as Nationalists. Hardline Nationalists are known as Republicans since they strive for a United Irish Republic.

A protracted multi-party ‘peace process’ resulted in a peace agreement, signed on Good Friday 1998, leading to the creation of a range of new political and human rights institutions and eventually in 2007 the formation of a devolved government that included the four main political parties. The transition from a society enmeshed in a long-running violent conflict to a largely peaceful society has ensured that the Northern Ireland peace process is widely regarded as one of the major successes of recent peacebuilding activity and a model for other conflict transformation work.

Northern Ireland: Conflict Timeline

1801: Act of Union – Ireland and Britain formally united
1905: Creation of Sinn Fein – a political party with the aim of freeing Ireland from British rule
1913: Creation of Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) – formed of Protestants who opposed Irish Home Rule
1916: Easter Uprising Irish Catholics proclaim an Irish Republic in Dublin, brutally suppressed by the British army. The Easter Uprising volunteers become known as the Irish Republican Army
1920: Partition of Ireland The 6 northern counties will remain part of the United Kingdom with a parliament in Belfast, while the 26 other counties form the Irish Free State with a parliament in Dublin. Conflict over partition led to intra-communal violence that left hundreds dead in 1922
1948: Irish Free State granted full independence from Britain and become the Republic of Ireland
1967: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) formed to agitate for full civil and political rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland. 19th century anti-Catholic laws remained on the statute books as the Northern Ireland parliament was dominated by Protestant Unionists
1968: Duke Street March was a demonstration of the Civil Rights Association that was violently attacked by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It is also commonly referred to as the beginning of the ‘Troubles’.
1969: Increasing tensions between Catholics and Protestants overwhelm the Royal Ulster Constabulary (police) and the British army are called in
1969: The Irish Republican Army (IRA) splits into the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA (PIRA).
1971: Internment (detention without trial) of IRA members legalised
1972: Bloody Sunday British Paratroopers fire on a peaceful civil rights protest in Derry, killing 14 people. Belfast parliament is suspended and Northern Ireland will be ruled direct from London. The IRA responds with increased attacks on British targets.
1980s: Hunger strikes and violent attacks on British targets in Northern Ireland the Britain
1994: IRA and Loyalist groups declare a ceasefire
1996: Multi-party peace talks break down over disarmament, violence resumes
1998 (April): 6 months of peace talks lead to the Good Friday Agreement and a formal end to hostilities

1998 (August): A bomb set by the Real IRA kills 29 civilians in Omagh, the worst single bombing of the Troubles for civilian victims

1999: Direct Rule ends as power is handed to the Northern Ireland Assembly

2000: Continuing controversy over the decommissioning of weapons leads to the reinstatement of Direct Rule and the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly from February to May

2001: The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) is replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) with recruitment set to be 50% Catholic and 50% Protestant.

2005: The PIRA announce that they have decommissioned

2007: A new Northern Ireland Assembly is elected

2009 (March): 2 British army soldiers are shot dead, then one British police officer. Dissident Republicans claim responsibility. Fears grow of a new phase of violence, but there are strong public displays of opposition to any more violence, and the killings are rejected by all political parties

2010 (January): Scandal involving Iris Robinson, MLA and wife of Peter Robinson, the First Minister of the NI Assembly, leads to Peter Robinson temporarily stepping down as First Minister – he resumes his role in February.

2010 (February): Announcement of a deal on the devolution of policing powers to the NI Assembly. This issue had been particularly contentious, and it was feared could cause the collapse of the Assembly.

2011 (April): Ronan Kerr, a 25-year-old Catholic PSNI officer, was killed after a bomb exploded under his car in Omagh, County Tyrone for which the Real IRA claimed responsibility. Hundreds of people peacefully marched through Omagh in protest against the violence

2011 (May): Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to Ireland, the first visit of a British Monarch since 1911 to the Republic of Ireland

2011 (June/July): The 2011 Northern Ireland riots were a series of riots starting originally in Belfast, before spreading to other parts of NI, and are considered the most serious in the area for a decade

2011 (September): Supergrass trials in Belfast cause Loyalist riots after the controversial supergrass hearings of the 1980s

2012 (June): Queen Elizabeth II shakes hands with deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein in a historic Jubilee visit to Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland: Key people and parties

General Terms

The Troubles: Name given to the period of armed conflict in Northern Ireland, from the late 1960s and usually taken to have ended with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Loyalist/Unionist: Supporters of the continuing status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Generally, though not exclusively, an ideology held by Protestants within Northern Ireland. The term loyalist is usually applied for more hard-line proponents of this position, or sometimes more specifically those who support the use of violence.

Republican/Nationalist: Supporters of Northern Ireland joining the Republic of Ireland to form a united Ireland. Generally, though not exclusively, an ideology held by Catholics within Northern Ireland. As with loyalist/unionist, the choice of the term
‘Republican’ or ‘Nationalist’ is usually made to distinguish between more hard-line (or paramilitary) proponents of this position, and more moderate groups or individuals.

**Internment:** The detention of peoples without trial. A tactic introduced in Northern Ireland in August 1971 to try and put down increasing violence in the province. Over the next 6 months, 2,357 people were arrested, the vast majority Catholics; due to outdated intelligence, many of these were entirely innocent. As well as failing in its intention to arrest leading members of the IRA, internment is also often cited as a cause of radicalisation and polarisation. Internment ended in 1975.

**Northern Ireland Assembly:** The devolved government of Northern Ireland, seated in Stormont, Belfast. Elected members are known as Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs).

**Good Friday Agreement:** The political agreement, signed in April 1998, that established the basis for devolution of government for Northern Ireland and the principle that all parties should be committed to exclusively peaceful politics. Agreed between leading nationalist and unionist parties and the British and Irish governments, then subsequently supported by 71% of the population of Northern Ireland on a referendum. The DUP was the only leading party to oppose the Good Friday Agreement, though they now have agreed to share power with Republican politicians, and the First Minister of the devolved Assembly is from the DUP.

### Political Parties

**Alliance Party:** Largest cross community party and usually associated with moderate unionism, the Alliance Party is long-established though has struggled to break the political dominance of the leading unionist and nationalist parties.

**Democratic Unionist Party (DUP):** Largest unionist political party, founded by Ian Paisley and now led by Peter Robinson. Traditionally, the more ‘hard-line’ of the two major unionist parties, the DUP is now however sharing devolved government with Sinn Fein.

**Social Democratic and Labour Party:** Previously the largest nationalist party, they consistently opposed the use of violence and were key to the Good Friday Agreement. Since then, they have been overtaken in the polls by Sinn Fein.

**Sinn Fein:** Largest Republican political party and closely aligned with the IRA.

**Ulster Unionist Party (UUP):** Currently the second largest unionist party, they were the largest party at the time of the Good Friday Agreement.

**Progressive Unionist Party (PUP):** Smaller loyalist party, representing a more left-wing and urban constituency.

**Women’s Coalition:** Cross-community political party formed to promote inclusion of women within the peace process. Contributed to the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement; now dissolved.

### Paramilitary Organisations

All of these groups are considered illegal/terrorist organisations in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

**Irish Republican Army (IRA):** Originally formed in 1913 to fight for Irish independence from Britain. Largely dormant from the 1920s until 1969 when political violence in Northern Ireland sparked a revival. In this year the IRA split between the Marxist ‘Official’ IRA and the more militant ‘Provisional’ IRA. The Provisional IRA became the predominant paramilitary organisation fighting against British rule in Northern Ireland. When people refer to the IRA, they are nearly always referring to the Provisional IRA, though there are smaller dissident organisations that also claim the name, such as the Official IRA and the Real IRA. These groups reject the Good
Friday Agreement and continue to use violence to try and achieve their goal of a united Ireland.
The IRA declared a ceasefire in 1994, and re-declared it in 1997 in the build-up to the Good Friday Agreement. The IRA decommissioned their weapons in 2005.

**Ulster Defence Association (UDA):** Loyalist paramilitary organisation. Declared a ceasefire in 1994 and completed decommissioning their weapons in January 2010.

**Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF):** Loyalist paramilitary organisation that called a ceasefire in 1994 and completed decommissioning their weapons in 2009.

**Politicians**

**Gerry Adams:** President of Sinn Fein and leader throughout the Peace Process. Often alleged that he is/was a member of the IRA, a claim that Adams has always denied.

**Tony Blair:** British Prime Minister 1997-2007 who helped negotiate the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 -arguably one of his most notable achievements.

**John Hume:** Founding member of the SDLP and key architect of the Good Friday Agreement. Received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998, jointly with David Trimble; retired from politics in 2004.

**George Mitchell:** Former US Democrat Senator who was Bill Clinton’s Special Envoy for Northern Ireland and who was credited with playing a key role in bringing about the Good Friday Agreement. Currently special envoy to the Middle East for the Obama administration.

**Martin McGuinness:** Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly and MP and MLA (Mid-Ulster) for Sinn Fein. A member of the IRA during the Troubles (he claims to no longer be a member), he was a leading negotiator for the Good Friday Agreement. A sign of the remarkable transformation of his public perception is that he was recently voted the most respected politician in Northern Ireland.

**Ian Paisley:** Co-founder of the DUP, its leader and dominant figure until his resignation as leader in 2008. Paisley is also a Protestant Minister and co-founder of the Free Presbyterian Church.

**Ian Paisley Jr:** Son of Ian Paisley and a leading figure of the DUP.

**Iris Robinson:** Wife of Peter Robinson and also MP and MLA for the DUP, she resigned from the NI Assembly and UK parliament after a damaging scandal in January 2010.

**Peter Robinson:** Long-term Deputy to Ian Paisley within the DUP who is now the First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly and MP and MLA for the DUP.

**David Trimble:** Ulster Unionist Party leader during the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement, he was key to securing the support of his party and the wider unionist community for the Agreement. Received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998, jointly with John Hume. Now a peer in the British House of Lords for the Conservative Party.

**SOURCE:** INCORE (International Conflict Resolution Institute) at the University of Ulster, supported by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

**Causes of Conflict in Northern Ireland**
The outbreak of political violence in the late 1960's is generally attributed to the different constitutional aspirations of Northern Ireland's Protestant and Catholic
communities (with Protestants generally pro-British and wanting Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, and Catholics generally pro Irish and wanting Northern Ireland to be reunified with the Republic of Ireland), as well as the inequalities between these communities. A web of religious, political, social and economic issues has therefore always lain at the heart of the conflict. Over time however, some of these issues have become less or more significant, whilst events within the conflict itself have also generated new grounds for dispute.

More specifically, as the overall level of political violence has subsided, so conflict has shifted to other arenas of tension. 'Interface' areas, where Protestant communities live directly alongside Catholic communities, often separated by so-called 'peace-lines', are one such physical manifestation of new areas of tension and intercommunal violence. Research indicates that interface communities have borne the brunt of the conflict in Northern Ireland and frequently experience heightened tension as well as outbreaks of disorder and violence. Moreover, in response to demographic change, lifestyle shifts and redevelopment, new interfaces are beginning to emerge. In some cases, so-called 'soft' interfaces, where boundaries are blurred and uncertain, are becoming 'hard' interfaces, which people are unwilling to question or breach.

As well as creating new interfaces between communities, gentrification and commercialisation are having a negative impact on working class communities, particularly Protestant communities. Many of these communities have lost socio-economic status with the decline of heavy industries in the region, and are struggling to come to terms with the social and political compromises demanded by the peace process. In this context, gentrification and commercialisation are often perceived to be further threatening and eroding Protestant communities, thereby fuelling defensive territoriality and further compounding a broader crisis in Protestant/unionist/loyalist identity.

More generally, parading and marching, and the use of flags to mark different groups and communities territory, seem to have become proxies for the violence of the past, and reflect continued insecurities and uncertainties on the part of Northern Ireland's Protestant and Catholic communities. The annual summer marching season (which sees members of the Loyal Orders parading in celebration of Protestant culture and communities, most contentiously in some instances through Catholic areas) has become the major source of violence and instability in the region, albeit less so in recent years.

In a broader sense, continued violence in post-conflict societies or peace processes is well documented. Indicators of Northern Ireland's current culture of violence include an increase in hate crime, domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and so-called 'recreational rioting.' More and more young people seem to be engaging in violence simply out of boredom and bravado.

Behind these highly visible causes and manifestations of conflict, the fabric of Northern Ireland society is also ingrained with patterns of sectarianism and division. There is no doubt that the region continues to suffer from the 'bigotry and prejudice, the de-humanised, emotionless, ruthless cynicism that leads to sectarian murder' (Community Relations Council). However, it is important to note that sectarianism is
not only a working-class or visibly violent phenomenon; it also encompasses the sectarian attitudes that pervade Northern Ireland and remain 'the ghost at the feast of much polite society'. (Community Relations Council).

Most recently, a dramatic rise in the number of migrant workers coming to live and work in Northern Ireland seems to have been met with a dramatic rise in racially motivated harassment and attacks. The media has even gone so far as to brand Belfast 'the race hate capital of Europe'. This has raised important questions about the linkages between sectarianism and racism, for example, whether they arise from the same 'politics of difference', operate in the same way, and feed on the same factors and legacies of the conflict.

**Consequences of Conflict in Northern Ireland**

More than 3,600 people have been killed and tens of thousands more injured as result of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland. With a population of approximately 1.7 million, this means that nearly everyone knows someone who has been killed or seriously injured. However, the conflict's myriad ripple effects, such as economic deprivation and disadvantage, make it impossible to calculate its true cost. Despite this complexity, there is something of a consensus of opinion that addressing the consequences of conflict should begin with meeting the needs of victims of violence. However, the definition of who constitutes a 'victim' in Northern Ireland is contested. For example, broad definitions of 'victimhood' are challenged for including those engaged in violent acts alongside those unconnected with the activities associated with the conflict. A range of policy initiatives have been introduced by both the Northern Ireland Office and the devolved Assembly to address the issue of victims/survivors in Northern Ireland.

Since 2004, the government has also begun to push for Northern Ireland to confront its past and undertake the long path towards reconciliation. Much attention has subsequently been devoted to the question of whether or not the region could benefit from a South African-style Truth Commission. The general conclusion seems to be that Northern Ireland needs its own tailored approach to dealing with the past and that this approach must benefit from some degree of cross-community support.

Significant progress has been made in reconciling former adversaries on the ground. As in other conflicts, a key element within the peace process has been the release and reintegration of politically-motivated prisoners. In Northern Ireland there are between 24,000 and 30,000 former prisoners (approximately 400 were released under the provisions of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement), many of whom have positively influenced the peace process and developed relationships with their former enemies. Many Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoner support groups are currently working together to address common issues such as social exclusion, poor health care and legal or de facto political, social and economic exclusion.

**State Building**

The 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement put the future of Northern Ireland's constitutional status into the hands of its citizens by declaring that Northern Ireland would remain within the UK, 'and shall not cease to be so without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a poll'. However, 'if the wish expressed by a majority in such a poll is that Northern Ireland should cease to be
part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland', then the UK and Irish
governments would give effect to this. Such a poll is unlikely to be called for some
time to come, but the British and Irish governments have made constitutional
changes to reflect the above principles.

Whatever Northern Ireland’s future constitutional status, self-sustaining and durable
peace requires strong infrastructures and institutions to be put into place.

The most immediate task of state building is generally post-conflict reconstruction.
Northern Ireland is fortunate in that its landscape bears few physical scars of the
conflict. However, the region’s physical infrastructure is extremely poor. This can be
attributed to 30 years of focus on the conflict in Northern Ireland, a legacy of under-
funding by government as compared to other regions in the UK, and the cost of
duplication of services in a segregated society. Infrastructural development is
therefore an increasingly ‘hot’ political and economic issue.

More progress has been made in relation to policing and the transition to a ‘normal’
security situation in Northern Ireland. New policing structures and arrangements
have been established, including an entirely new Policing Board, network of District
Policing Partnerships and Police Ombudsman. The devolution of the policing and
justice portfolio to the Northern Ireland Executive has been achieved.

Alongside the development of new priorities for, and approaches to, regional
infrastructure provision, the entire system of public administration in Northern Ireland
is undergoing extensive reform. These reforms will have wide ranging and long
lasting implications for everyone who lives in Northern Ireland and include plans to
reduce the number of local councils from 26 to 11, to restructure education, health
and social services, and to dramatically reduce the number of public
bodies/QUANGO’s in the region.

Political, Social & Economic Transformation
Numerous political, social and economic transformations have aided the peace
process in Northern Ireland. In terms of human rights and equality, important pieces
of legislation have been introduced. Section 75 of the 1998's Northern Ireland Act,
for example, places a duty on the public sector to promote equality of opportunity
and good community relations in every aspect of its work. The Equality and Human
Rights Commissions have been established, and various European and international
obligations now offer additional protections. In particular, much attention has recently
been focused on the potential of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland to create a ‘floor’
of shared values and enforceable rights.

In the area of social transformation, it has always been Northern Ireland’s community
and voluntary organisations that have borne the burden of improving community
cohesion on the ground, as well as the relations within these communities. Over the
past 30 years or so, community development work has grown to include such
diverse activities as combating poverty and inequality, challenging the state,
providing community education, building community capacity, delivering public
services and generating wealth to be reinvested in communities.

Efforts to promote understanding and peaceful interaction between different
communities in Northern Ireland also vary enormously. Community relations work can be seen to encompass, for example, initiatives to promote dialogue within and between communities, end sectarianism in the workplace, empower the long-term unemployed and disenfranchised, and celebrate cultural traditions.

Women have consistently been the mainstay of community development and community relations activity in the region. Moreover, networks, associations and activities specifically designed for women continue to flourish. Evidence suggests however, that it is women who most often do the background work, and their contribution to peacebuilding remains undervalued and under-resourced. This is particularly significant because the prominence of women in Northern Ireland politics has also declined: the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (a non-sectarian party which promoted the role of women and which played an important role in the negotiations of the Agreement and the Northern Ireland Assembly) was wound down in May 2006, on the grounds that its members are now more useful and active in spheres like the Policing Board, the Parades Commission and the Human Rights Commission.

In the wake of the EU's massive investment, and now reduction, of Peace monies in Northern Ireland, the community and voluntary sector has been forced to reflect on what it has achieved to date, and how it should be sustained in future. With resources becoming more scarce there is increasing interest (on the part of both funders and community and voluntary sector organisations themselves) in addressing duplication and fragmentation within the sector, as well as increasing the sharing of best practices. To secure financial viability, more and more community and voluntary organisations are also developing social enterprises and seeking to engage in the delivery of public services.

At a more conceptual level, a number of leading community and voluntary organisations have turned away from traditional conflict resolution approaches towards the concept of conflict transformation. Rather than concentrate on the specific issues involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland, many have a new focus on bringing about constructive change and building positive relationships.

The role of religion and the churches continues to be of great relevance across many areas of Northern Ireland society. While interfaith dialogue and inter-church cooperation appear to be growing, widespread sectarianism and segregation along confessional lines remain. Debate continues over the legacy of religion throughout Northern Ireland's troubled history. The impact of the churches as institutions is especially evident in matters such as education and attitudes toward mixed marriages. At the same time, many observers cite the influence of the churches, and religion more broadly, as factors which served to mitigate the violence of recent decades. The unique position from which the churches of Northern Ireland might contribute to peacebuilding and healing remains the focus of much attention.

In response to Northern Ireland's rapidly growing diversity many community and voluntary organisations are beginning to address the needs of minority ethnic people in the region. Moreover, minority ethnic people are themselves increasingly driving community relations and community development work.
It is therefore especially significant that the Northern Ireland Office published both A Shared Future and The Racial Equality Strategy. Combined, these documents aimed to put a comprehensive policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland into place for the first time. They are also interlinked and cross-reference one another, thereby recognising that Northern Ireland's growing diversity has implications for Protestant/Catholic community relations and vice versa. These policies have yet to be put into practice and greater efforts are undoubtedly required to address the specific issues facing minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland.

Finally, the future political, social and economic transformation of Northern Ireland will ultimately depend on its young people. The region currently benefits from a large and informal youth sector which plays an important role in relation to education, welfare provision and working with marginalised young people. Much debate and discussion continues however, about the value and feasibility of integrated education in Northern Ireland particularly in terms of its impact on community relations.

**Funding**

Northern Ireland has long benefited from a range of EU Structural Funds, and much of this funding has been equalled by contributions from the public and private sector. The introduction of EU Peace and Reconciliation funding in 1995 to help embed the peace process has been especially significant, and worth well over £1 billion to the region. The Peace programme has stimulated a tremendous amount of peacebuilding activity on the ground and contributed to efforts to address the many causes and consequences of the conflict. However, it has also faced many criticisms for being overly bureaucratic, failing to plan for a smooth transition between different phases of the programme, and for, at times, distorting the mission of projects and entire organisations.

Given that funding under the Peace III programme for 2007-13 is substantially less than Peace II and places greater emphasis on reconciliation and cross-border activity, the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland is currently facing a new, much chillier funding climate.

The government has subsequently conducted a review of its relationship to the community and voluntary sector, and developed a new strategy for resourcing the sector. This strategy reflects the government's growing interest in the delivery of public services by the community and voluntary sector, and promotes longer-term approaches to funding, with increased focus on the quality of outputs and their relevance to agreed outcomes.

An alternative concept of funding for the community and voluntary sector is also gaining increased attention: community foundations, governed by a board of citizens, make grants to other non-profit groups (often from endowments and trusts), provide services to donors, and engage in a broad range of community leadership and partnership activities. Funding from organisations such as the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, thus, will provide an increasingly viable alternative to government and EU monies, especially in the current funding climate.

**Intervention Issues**
A number of macro issues are currently impacting on peacebuilding practices in Northern Ireland. The sheer magnitude of Peace monies invested in the region and the fact this funding is currently drawing to a close, has generated increased interest in, and pressure for, collection and sharing of 'best practices' related to peacebuilding. This has dovetailed with a more global trend towards 'evidence-based' peacebuilding. Improving the interface between research, policy and practice is therefore critical.

There is also mounting pressure to measure and demonstrate the impact of peacebuilding projects and programmes. More recently, awareness has grown about the many different purposes evaluations can serve, for example, in relation to improving projects and programmes as they are delivered, and in managing change.

The concept of social capital has become important in this drive to measure the impact of peacebuilding initiatives. This is perhaps because Northern Ireland has something of an instinctive grasp of the difference between 'bridging' and 'bonding' capital, and the different contributions each makes to social cohesion. For example, policymakers and practitioners have long been aware of the limits of single-identity work. The question is the extent to which the concept of social capital can really be applied and put into practice.

**SOURCE:** Insight on Conflict (website) – a project launched by the UK charity Peace Direct

**Sri Lanka: Conflict Profile**

**The Roots of the Conflict**
Tensions in Sri Lanka first boiled over into a civil war in 1983, but the roots of the conflict extend far further than that. The conflict takes its roots from the tensions between the mainly Buddhist Sinhalese majority and the mainly Hindu Tamil minority, who now make up 82 per cent and 9 per cent of the country’s population respectively. Prior to the conflict these statistics were 74 per cent and 18 per cent, indicating the huge numbers of Tamils who have fled the country.

Prior to independence in 1948, the Sinhalese felt discriminated against by their British rulers, leading to the development of Sinhalese political nationalism. With independence and the establishment of a first-past-the-post electoral system, much of the power was placed in the hands of Sinhalese governments. These governments brought in legislation leading to the increasing marginalisation of the Tamil minority, including the 1956 Official Language Act. This led to increasingly strained relations between the two groups and numerous violent riots.

**Conflict History**
This increasing violence led to the eventual outbreak of war in July 1983. Conflict in the North and East was mainly between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); however the violence in Sri Lanka has also been fuelled by insurrections carried out by the Sinhalese Peoples Liberation Front (JVP). The situation has also been worsened by the 2003 Tsunami which affected all of the communities in Sri Lanka. After the outbreak of war numerous attempts at peace negotiations and ceasefires were interspersed with further conflict outbreaks. After
the failure of the most recent peace talks President Rajapaksa began a military offensive aimed at achieving complete victory over the LTTE. Victory was declared in May 2009 after the last of the LTTE controlled areas were captured, but numerous questions remain over the country’s prospects for peace.

Prospects for Peace
The presidential elections were held in January 2010. President Rajapaksa was re-elected with 57 per cent of the vote, but has faced allegations of intimidation and misuse of state resources. His main rival, General Fonseka gained 40 per cent of the votes and was quickly arrested after the election.

It is clear that the country is still far from creating a stable peace. The issues at the root of the LTTE insurgency have not been addressed – in fact the brutal nature of the final days of the war may have exacerbated them. It is estimated that the war has killed approximately 80,000 people and displaced around 1 million civilians. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates there are approximately 370,000 internally displaced people in Sri Lanka. Navi Pillay, UN Commissioner for Human Rights in 2009 has accused both sides of war crimes and there is little indication that the government has any plans to deal with these allegations. In addition to the allegations against President Rajapaksa, there are allegations of government corruption, and the absence of media freedom raises further concerns.

Furthermore, despite considerably calm and fair parliamentary elections in April 2010 – with the expected ruling coalition’s landslide – the end of the year witnessed rising tensions and the newly elected Sri Lankan Parliament approving a constitutional change, allowing President Rajapaksa to seek an unlimited number of terms.

In February 2011, thousands of protesters, marking the one-year anniversary of the detention of the opposition leader in the aftermath of the 2010 elections, powerfully illustrated the fragility of Sri Lankas’s post-war society.

Sri Lanka: Conflict Timeline

1796: Britain begins to take over the island of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon).

1815: Britain conquers the Kingdom of Kandy, and begins bringing Tamil labourers from India to work on tea, coffee and coconut plantations.

1833: The whole island is united under British administration.

1931: The right to vote is granted and power sharing with a Sinhalese cabinet is introduced.

1948: Ceylon gains independence. Ceylon Citizenship Act is passed which effectively makes over 700,000 Indian-origin Tamil plantation workers stateless.

1956: On the back of a wave of Sinhalese nationalism, Solomon Bandaranaike leads the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) to a landslide victory in the presidential elections. Sinhala is made the official language of Sri Lanka. Over 100 Tamils are killed in widespread violence protesting the new laws.

1958: Over 200 people are killed in anti-Tamil violence, thousands of Tamils displaced.

1959: Bandaranaike is assassinated by a Buddhist monk and succeeded by his widow, Sirimavo.

1964: Sirima-Shastri pact between Ceylon and India produces an agreement that would give 525,000 Tamils Indian citizenship.

1971 (Apr): An attempted uprising by the People’s Liberation Front – a Sinhalese Marxist group led by students and activists – is thwarted.
1972: Ceylon changes its name to Sri Lanka (Sinhala for ‘resplendent land’), and a new constitution gives prominence to Buddhism and the Sinhala language, making them the official religion and language respectively, causing further antagonism among the Hindu Tamil Population. Velupillai Prabhakaran forms the Tamil New Tigers, which begin perpetrating small scale attacks.

1975: Alfred Duriappah, the Mayor of Jaffna, is shot and killed by members of the Tamil New Tigers. This is the first such political assassination by Tamil separatists.

1976: Led by Prabhakaran, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is formed amongst increasing tensions in Tamil majority areas in north and east Sri Lanka. Tamil politicians pass the ‘Vaddukodai Resolution’ pledging the establishment of an independent Tamil state.

1977: In the general election, the separatist Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) party wins all seats in Tamil areas, leading to anti-Tamil riots that leave more than 100 Tamils dead.

1978: A new Sri Lankan government passes the country’s second constitution, which recognises Tamil as a national language.

1979: The Prevention of Terrorism Act is introduced, granting extensive powers to Sri Lankan security forces to stop the growing conflict in the north. Important safeguards against human rights abuses are removed and mass arrests of Tamil youth begin.

1981: Sinhala policemen are accused of burning the Jaffna Public Library, causing further resentment in Tamil community. In October Tamil insurgents shoot dead two Sri Lankan soldiers.

1982 (November): The first LTTE member is killed by Sri Lankan forces.

1982: India informs Sri Lanka that it no longer considers the Tamil repatriation agreements binding, with 86,000 applications still pending.

1983: An LTTE ambush kills 13 Sri Lankan soldiers, sparking two days of anti-Tamil riots across the country that cause the deaths of hundreds of Tamils, and causing more than 100,000 to flee to India. Parliament passes laws banning calls and support for a separate Tamil state. The riots turned simmering ethnic tensions into an open civil war and a period the Tigers refer to as the ‘First Eelam War’.

1985: The first attempt at peace talks between the government and LTTE fails in Bhutan. In May, Tamil militants attack the city of Anuradhapura – the ancient capital and Buddhist holy city – killing over 140 Sinhalese civilians. One of the worst attacks of the conflict.


1987 (May-Aug): The government launches Operation Liberation, which pushes the LTTE back into Jaffna – leading to over 1,000 deaths and 2,000 arrests. The signing of the Indo-Lankan Peace Accord (ISPA) leads to the beginning of Indian mediated peace talks, and eventually seeing LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran attend talks in India. The peace talks see the Sri Lankan government granting some autonomy to Tamil dominated areas, and around 50,000 Indian troops arrive in Jaffna as peacekeepers to disarm the LTTE and enforce the peace deal. Although initially the LTTE began to disarm, the deal soon broke down and fighting between the LTTE and Indian forces begins.

1988-1990: The Sinhalese Peoples Liberation Front (JVP) begins their second armed insurrection in protest against the presence of Indian troops in Sri Lanka.
Estimates vary, but it is believed between 17,000 and 60,000 people are killed or ‘disappeared’ in the ensuing conflict.

1990: As Indian troops are forced to leave Sri Lanka, violence between the government and Tamil separatists escalates. The LTTE begins to attack the Muslim population, over 75,000 are evicted from northern Tamil areas, and it is estimated over 1,000 are killed in the east. The beginning of the ‘Second Eelam War’.

1991: The LTTE are accused of the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

1993: An LTTE suicide bomber kills President Premadasa.

1994: A new government led by Chandrika Kumaratunge renews peace talks with the LTTE.

1995: The peace talks end abruptly, and the ‘Third Eelam War’ begins with the sinking of a Sri Lankan naval vessel by the LTTE. The conflict intensifies, and thousands are killed.

1997: The USA designates the LTTE a terrorist organisation.

1998: 13 people are killed in a LTTE suicide bombing at the Temple of the Tooth – the holiest Buddhist shrine in Sri Lanka.

1999: A key Tamil MP in the peace talks – Neelan Thiruchelvan – is killed by an LTTE suicide bomber. President Kumaratunge survives a bombing at an election rally in Colombo.

2000: The Norwegian government offers to mediate between the government and the LTTE.

2001: An LTTE attack on Bandaranaike International Airport destroys half of the Sri Lankan Airlines fleet, as well as a number of air force fighter jets. Ranil Wickremesinghe becomes Prime Minister, followed quickly by an LTTE ceasefire which declares it wishes to pursue peace talks with the new government.

2002: The government and LTTE sign the Norwegian-mediated permanent ceasefire. Weapons decommissioning begins, the A9 Highway – the only land link between the Jaffna Peninsula and the rest of Sri Lanka – reopens, and passenger flights between Jaffna and the rest of the country resume.

2003 (Apr): The LTTE pull out of peace talks, arguing too little is being done to rebuild war-damaged Tamil areas, but the ceasefire holds.

2004 (July): The first suicide bomb since 2001 explodes in Colombo.

2004 (Dec): The Indian Ocean tsunami kills around 35,000 people, both Sinhalese and Tamil communities are affected.


2005 (Nov): The presidential election is won by Mahinda Rajapaksa. The poll is boycotted by Tamils.

2006 (Feb): The government and LTTE agree to respect the 2001 ceasefire agreement.

2006 (Apr): The conflict begins to escalate again. Government air strikes begin in Tamil controlled areas after a suicide bomber kills nine civilians, and injures the army chief, Sarath Fonseka, in an attack on the main military compound in Colombo.

2006 (Jun-Jul): The LTTE demands EU peace monitors withdraw, after they list the group as a terrorist organisation. The government begins to move into rebel territory.


2006 (Nov): Natarajah Raviraj, a leading Tamil MP is killed in Colombo. The LTTE state they see no reason to fight for anything less than full independence.
2006 (Dec): The Prevention of Terrorism Act is reinstated.
2007 (Mar): LTTE launch an airstrike using light aircraft against a government air base.
2007 (June): Citing security concerns, hundreds of Tamils are forced out of Colombo by police.
2008 (Jan): The government officially withdraws from the 2002 ceasefire agreement.
2008 (Mar): An international panel brought in by the government to monitor alleged human rights abuses – the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons – leaves the country, claiming its work is hampered by the government.
2008 (Jun): The military announce they have claimed a major LTTE naval base in Vidattaltivu.
2009 (Jan): The government captures the town of Kilinochchi, held for ten years by the Tamil Tigers, and serving as their de-facto capital. President Rajapaksa declares victory is inevitable and urges the rebels to surrender.
2009 (Feb): The conditions of thousands of civilians trapped in the battle zone begins to raise international concern, and calls for a temporary ceasefire are made.
2009 (Mar): Former rebel leader Colonel Karuna becomes the Minister for National Integration and Reconciliation. Whilst Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, accuses both sides of war crimes.
2009 (May): The government declares victory of the rebels as the last parts of LTTE controlled areas are captured. The military claim rebel leader Prabhakaran was killed by special forces whilst attempting to flee the fighting.
2009 (Aug): The first post-conflict elections are held in the north.
2010 (Jan): In the first presidential elections since the end of the civil war Rajapaksa is re-elected with 57 per cent of the vote, with Fonseka, his main opponent, on 40 per cent.
2010 (Feb): President Rajapaksa dissolves the parliament for April elections.
2010 (Apr): President Rajapaksa’s ruling coalition wins the parliamentary elections with a landslide victory.
2010 (Sep): The Parliament approves a constitutional change allowing the President to seek an unlimited number of terms.
2011 (Feb): Thousands rallied in Colombo 8 February to mark the one-year anniversary of detention of opposition leader Sarath Fonseka.

Sri Lanka: Key People & Parties

Political Parties and Organisations
Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (People’s Liberation Front – JVP): A Marxist, Sinhalese nationalist, political party. JVP led two insurgenacies in the early Seventies and late Eighties – both were brutally crushed by the government (led by the UNP in both cases). The first left 20,000 dead, the second 50,000 and the party almost unable to function. Opposed to any idea of Tamil autonomy, the JVP supported Rajapaksa in the 2004 elections, but switched to Fonseka in 2010.
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE): Usually just referred to as the Tamil Tigers. The LTTE were the primary rebel group in the Sri Lankan conflict until their defeat in May 2009. Founded in 1974, and for much of its existence, led by Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE fought a brutal campaign against the Sri Lankan government. A proscribed terrorist organisation in many countries, and one of the first groups to systematically make use of suicide bombing, the LTTE attacked civilian as well as military targets.
New Democratic Front: The alliance of political parties created to support the Fonseka candidacy in the 2010 elections. A loose coalition of disparate groups including the Marxist People’s Liberation Front (JVP), the United National Party (UNP) – the main opposition party – and the Tamil nationalist Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP): Currently the party in power, led by Rajapaksa. The party was responsible for the passing of the Sinhala Only Act in 1958.

United National Party (UNP): Currently the main opposition party, but spent the majority of the Seventies and Eighties in power. It was a UNP government that carried out the brutal reprisals against the JVP – allegedly using death squads in 1989 – and passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act which gave the government sweeping powers to counter the LTTE insurgency in the North and East.

United People’s Freedom Alliance: Coalition of Sinhalese nationalist political parties that supported the SLFP candidate, Rajapaksa, in the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections.

People

Sarath Fonseka: Commander of the army during the defeat of the LTTE. Fonseka stood against Rajapaksa in the 2010 presidential election. A staunch Sinhalese nationalist for most of his life, Fonseka tempered these views during the 2010 election campaign as he sought to gain the support of ethnic minorities opposed to Rajapaksa.

Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (aka Colonel Karuna Amma): Led a breakaway faction of the LTTE in 2004, ostensibly in protest that the LTTE leadership – based in the North of the country – did little for the situation in the east. With Karuna’s group receiving backing from the Sri Lankan government, the two factions fought briefly in 2004, before Karuna laid down his weapons and entered national politics. He is currently serving as Minister for National Integration, and is the only former LTTE member to enter mainstream politics.

Velupillai Prabhakaran: Founder and leader of the LTTE until his death in 2009. He formed the LTTE out the Tamil New Tigers around 1974, and shortly after the group was implicated in the assassination of the Mayor of Jaffna in 1975, which marked the beginning of a new stage in the conflict.

Mahinda Rajapaksa: Current President of Sri Lanka, serving since 2004. Rajapaksa led the country during the final days of the civil war in 2009. Although he initially seemed to prefer a negotiated settlement with the LTTE, he soon took the uncompromising approach that led to the group’s military defeat in 2009. Shortly after, he was returned to power in an early presidential election, with 57 per cent of the vote in January 2010.

STUDY GROUP ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES, COLOMBO, SRI LANKA, 25 – 29 OCTOBER 2004, Hosted by CPA Sri Lanka Branch, STUDY GROUP OBSERVATIONS

DIALOGUING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND A FREE MEDIA
Civil society makes an important contribution to conflict prevention. Although, unlike Parliament, civil society groups are not elected they nevertheless derive their membership from the public and are a reservoir of knowledge. Parliament should be prepared to engage more readily with civil society to encourage a two-way flow of information and should support efforts to ensure civil society participation;
A free, fair and responsible media plays an important role in disseminating information, providing accountability and assisting Parliament build a dialogue with the community. It is a matter of concern that, in some countries, state media enjoyed a monopoly on the flow of information. State funded media agencies should not be an extension of the ministry of information, rather should be administered with a public service charter. Furthermore, a diverse and responsible media sector should also be encouraged.

In recognition of the special role the media plays in a democracy and in the peacebuilding process, Parliaments should endeavour to facilitate the media’s work by encouraging the introduction of right to information legislation, ensuring freedom of speech and freeing up restrictions on public service broadcasting.

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE OPPOSITION
The opportunities for opposition parties to contribute to peace building differ widely depending on the circumstances. In situations where a country is affected by violent conflict, Parliamentarians have the potential to act as a bridge between the conflicting parties and the government. In this way opposition Parliamentarians may be able to instigate confidence-building measures, which are an essential precondition to bringing conflicting parties to the negotiating table. Both government and the opposition could contribute to ending violent conflict by working together to develop an approach to resolving the violent conflict across party lines. Opposition Parliamentarians could contribute to peace-building in situations where there is not violent conflict. Opposition Parliamentarians are able to reach out and speak to people in their districts directly and where appropriate forgo acrimonial politics in an attempt to develop a national consensus and reconciliation. Opposition parties have an essential part in the Parliamentary process.

DECENTRALISATION
There have to be clear reasons for commencing a decentralization process and these reasons should be kept in mind when developing a decentralization strategy. Decentralization, whether in the form of federalism, devolution or administrative decentralization, can contribute to promoting participation, accountability and responsiveness, whilst aiding conflict resolution. Fiscal relations are at the core of any decentralization process and these issues need to be clarified in order facilitate successful implementation and reduce the potential for conflict.

REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY PEACE-BUILDING
Parliamentarians are urged to forge regional relationships, either by developing informal networks, joining inter-Parliamentary associations or participating in regional institutions. There are some challenges with developing regional relationships, in particular duplicating efforts and diverting scarce resources away from other priority areas. Those challenges should be taken into account, but should not hinder the development of regional relationships.

As a precondition for parliamentarians being able to conduct their business, members must respect parliament as an institution, and exhibit a willingness to work together to solve common problems. For this reason, before seeking to conduct
parliamentary business, whether on the floor of parliament or in committees, any potential animosities that exist need to be addressed. Only after parliamentarians from previously hostile factions reconcile to work together through the political process can they build relationships across party lines and beyond their original group allegiances. For parliament to exercise a leadership role in a broader reconciliation process, parliamentarians themselves need to be able to work together. Parliament must consider confidence-building measures between the governing party and the opposition. The level of confidence between different sides of parliament can be bolstered, for example, by ensuring transparency in decisionmaking, placing greater importance on the committee structure, and above all, ensuring that all parliamentarians participate in parliamentary business, rather than sidelining certain groups or members.

**Codes of Conduct**
A non-partisan parliamentary “code of conduct” that reflects parliament’s standing in the community should be developed to establish a standard of conduct expected from members when in and out of parliament. Breaches of the code are referred to the Presiding Officer, or Speaker, a parliamentary committee on standards or privileges, or some other complaints mechanism.

**Rules of Procedure**
Parties are most partisan during parliamentary debates and for this reason the procedures for debates need to be transparent, well defined and closely adhered if this forum is to serve as a conflict management tool rather than a place to merely entrench the positions of conflicting parties.

**Committee Deliberations**
Though there are a number of ways parliaments and parliamentarians are able to contribute to peacebuilding, the most notable is through the committee mechanism. There is no single model for the conduct of parliamentary committees. Some countries include the type of committee structure in their constitutions, whilst others have sectoral committees and other countries instigate ad hoc specialized public interest committees. The decision-making process within committees lends itself to consensus decision-making. This occurs when issues are brought before the committee and are resolved through compromise. The committee system enables committee members to bring the specific concerns of their constituents to the decision-making process. In addition, the absence of the public and the media during private negotiations often makes it easier for parliamentarians to make compromises across party lines.

Parliamentary committees operate as effective peacebuilding models, particularly committees that are issue specific, as they ensure the conflict moves from a people-centred approach to a debate about the issues. Furthermore, parliamentarians who have constituencies that are specifically concerned about certain issues, for instance rural communities or minority ethnic and religious groups, are able to bring their concerns to the table and ensure that a compromise solution is reached.

**Legislative Development**
When given the opportunity, parliament should pass legislation that creates an environment assisting peace-building. This type of legislation is usually introduced by
the executive but an effective parliament can promote its introduction. In order to develop an informed and accountable democracy governments and parliaments should:

- Pass freedom of information legislation and resist legislation that could be used to suppress freedom of speech and the media;
- Apply parliamentary privilege fully to all fair and accurate reports of parliamentary proceedings, including committees;
- Exercise caution in the passage of anti-terrorism legislation which may limit society’s freedom or make the state less accountable;
- Reject or repeal laws that empower the state to censure or punish political opponents and the media for partisan reasons; and
- Facilitate the introduction and adoption of legislation that protects fundamental freedoms.

Fourteen parliamentarians representing eight Commonwealth parliaments in countries recently or currently affected by conflict, met in Vienna, Austria, in October 2010 under the auspices of the CPA and the World Bank Institute:

The World Bank’s 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development has identified a number of new kinds of conflict, which include: gang violence; political violence, such as that which erupted in Kenya after the 2007 election; cross-border violence, such as that being perpetrated by the Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda and neighbouring states; drug trafficking wars such as those across sections of Latin America; and serious violence resulting from other forms of criminal activity.

The Vienna group received World Bank data which shows a high correlation between poverty and conflict. Statistics suggest that one state with a per capita income of less than $2,000 a year is likely to find itself caught up in violent conflict every five years. When per capita income rises to between $2,000 and $4,000 per year the frequency falls to one state every eight years and above $4,000 it further reduces to one state every 33 years.

While the Vienna group identified that the exporting of commodities, low levels of secondary schooling and low economic growth are not necessarily the factors which cause conflicts; rather, they have a tendency to be the backdrop against disputes are more likely to turn violent. This makes them valuable indicators to help parliamentarians like us spot and so avert potential conflicts.

Interestingly the Vienna group was informed that in all conflicts between 1816 and 1990, only 18% involved wars between democracies. Autocracies and states transitioning to democracy are much more likely to fall into conflict. Again, we can see the importance of the democratic process and our position within it in creating the environment where disputes or grievances can be aired and resolved before they escalate into violence.
Accountability
Sri Lanka has made no progress toward justice for the extensive laws of war violations committed by both sides during the long civil war, including the government’s indiscriminate shelling of civilians and the LTTE’s (“Tamil Tigers”) use of thousands of civilians as “human shields” in the final months of the conflict. Since the war ended the government has not launched a single credible investigation into alleged abuses.
The government has repeatedly extended the deadline for the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). The LLRC’s mandate focuses on the breakdown of the 2002 ceasefire between the government and the LTTE, and does not explicitly require it to investigate alleged war crimes during the conflict. The LLRC heard testimony but undertook no investigations into such allegations.

Torture, Enforced Disappearances, and Arbitrary Detention
While the government allowed longstanding emergency regulations to lapse in August, it failed to rescind other legislation granting police and other security forces overbroad detention powers and it adopted new regulations that in effect continue several of the emergency provisions.

Reconciliation Efforts
Reconciliation efforts, meant to address longstanding grievances of the ethnic Tamil population, have been slow at best. The talks have been rife with tension, with the TNA accusing the government of deceitful and facetious behaviour, and the government accusing the TNA of issuing LTTE type ultimatums as a result of its electoral victory in the north.

Internally Displaced Persons
The vast majority of the nearly 300,000 civilians illegally confined in military-controlled detention centres after the war have moved out of the centres back into communities, although not necessarily into their original homes. About 110,000 persons still live with host families or in camps and several thousand are not able to return because their home areas have not been demined. The government has still not granted international demining agencies access to several areas.

Key International Actors
Pressure on accountability from key international actors mounted following the April release of a damning panel report commissioned by the UN secretary-general. Several countries—including Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States—called on Sri Lanka to investigate the allegations contained in the report. The European Parliament adopted a resolution in May urging Sri Lanka to immediately investigate the allegations and the European Union to “support further efforts to strengthen the accountability process in Sri Lanka and to support the UN report.” At a Commonwealth summit in October, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper
called for a boycott of a planned Commonwealth heads of government summit in Sri Lanka in 2013, should Sri Lanka fail to improve its human rights record by that time.

**BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION, COLUMBO, SRI LANKA**

The British High Commission funds the **Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness Diploma course** at the University of Bradford. This course catered specifically to Sri Lankan students involved in academia, law, development and public service. The academic focus of this programme was mainly on peace preparedness. The students hoped that their new knowledge would assist them in promoting peace and reconciliation in a new context.

The British High Commission in Colombo is funding the **Asia Foundation Access to Justice (A2J)** project’s pioneering effort to provide intensive Tamil language training for police officers from the constable to sergeant level. These new language skills – along with insights gained through complementary discussions about ethnicity, justice, and equality – are empowering male and female police officers to serve citizens in a more effective, sensitive, and responsive manner. The A2J project in Sri Lanka is aimed to protect vulnerable citizens through both community-level interventions and formal institutions of justice.

**Quarterly Updates of Sri Lanka human rights**  
**Latest Update: 31 March 2012**

The trend of increased abductions or disappearances in Sri Lanka since October last year continued into 2012. According to the Colombo-based Lawyers for Democracy, there were eleven reported abductions in January. Victims came from a range of ethnic groups and included human rights workers, businessmen and some accused of involvement in organised criminal networks. Campaigners have blamed the rise on pro-government and security forces.

Following a fuel price hike in February, country-wide protests took place.

On 22 February, at a Westminster Hall Debate on human rights in Sri Lanka, FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Alistair Burt said that UK policy on Sri Lanka was not “starry-eyed about allegations against the Sri Lankan government or unaware of concerns about current human rights issues,” and that the onus should be on the Sri Lankan government to address these concerns. He also said that implementation of the LLRC recommendations was the real test of Sri Lanka’s progress since the end of the war.