



Forum of Federations:

***An International Network on
Federalism***

Forum des fédérations :

***un réseau international sur le
fédéralisme***

Report on the Program in Support of the Sri Lanka Peace Process

At the conclusion of the third set of peace talks (Oslo, Dec. 5, 2002) the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), achieved a breakthrough by agreeing that their common goal was a federal constitutional arrangement for Sri Lanka. It was during the Forum's initial consultation with the LTTE in December 2002, Oslo that this announcement was jointly made by both parties.

The Forum is conducting activities in Sri Lanka on two different tracks:

Track 1 is the closed-door consultation to the negotiating parties, which started, in effect, in Oslo. Mr. Bob Rae, former Premier of Ontario, and President of the Forum of Federations, and Dr. David Cameron, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto provided technical expertise to key stakeholders during the margins of the fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of peace talks. The Forum also met with the LTTE political committee in the North to speak about the basics of federalism. Mr. Rae and Dr. Cameron have continued to meet with all parties during the suspension of peace talks.

The Track 2 approach consists of public education activities on federalism with civil society groups such as civil servants, LTTE leaders, journalists, minority and religious groups and public seminars with the Sri Lanka Diaspora regarding the peace process.

Public Education Activities

The Forum of Federations and the Centre for Policy Alternatives offered two courses on federalism in August/September 2004 – *The Federal Idea and Federalism, Conflict Resolution and Governance*.

1. *The Federal Idea* focused on the basic definition and models of federalism and was tailored for peace activists, journalists and NGO officials. 75 people from across the country, representing diverse ethnic background, participated in the course. The course focused on the following models of federalism: Canada, Switzerland, Belgium and India. Group discussions and debates enabled the participants to eliminate misconceptions on federalism and clarify uncertainties and reservations on a federal system of governance. The key lecturers were: the Honourable Bob Rae (Canada), Dr. David Cameron (Canada), Dr. Johanne Poirier (Belgium) and Dr. Ash Roy (India). The final session of the course posed the question "Peace in Sri Lanka: Does it include Federalism?". The participants completed the course with the challenge of re-thinking Peace in Sri Lanka in a federal context.

II. *Federalism, Conflict Resolution and Governance* provided a more in-depth analysis of the concepts of federalism to a group of 25 political scientists, academics and civil servants. The course was structured around the following theme based issues: conflict resolution, asymmetry, fiscal arrangements and federalism in Sri Lanka. Dr. Yash Ghai, Dr. Violetta Ruiz Almendral, Dr. Roger Wilkins, Mr. Rohan Edrisinha and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu prepared reading materials and taught the above-mentioned sessions.

In February 2004 the Forum organized a series of four workshops on responsible reporting in power sharing arrangements. The media plays a significant role in Sri Lanka educating the general public about the process of peace and politics throughout the country. Therefore, the Forum in collaboration with the CPA held workshops throughout the country with journalists, editors and owners of various print, radio and TV outlets. Three journalists, Mr. Guy Tegenbos (Belgium), Mr. Graham Fraser (Canada) and Mr. Martin Stürzinger (Switzerland) were invited to engage in discussions about their respective federal countries and the challenges they faced when reporting on governance issues in the media.

In the first phase of the program the Forum and the CPA conducted two rounds of public awareness seminars on power sharing arrangements in the North, East and South of Sri Lanka. Since the declaration made by both parties at the 4th round of peace talks in Oslo, December 2002 to “explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka” there has been a great interest in the meaning of federalism and its potential impact on the country by the general public. Combining this interest with the current lack of public education and participation in the peace process it was felt there is a great need to educate and engage the Sri Lankan key civil society stakeholders about federalism and related issues. Therefore, the purpose of the public awareness missions were to engage a wide spectrum of Sri Lankan civil society members on issues related to federalism such as: minority rights in federalism, fiscal arrangements, law and order issues and federalism as an method of conflict resolution.

Sri Lanka Diaspora

The Forum organized a panel discussion entitled “Peace in Sri Lanka. Does it Include Federalism?” at the University of Toronto on December 15, 2003. The event initiated a thoughtful and informed discussion and debate amongst the Sri Lankan Diaspora on the issue of federalism as it relates to the process of peace in Sri Lanka.