

Project Proposal

# Sri Lanka: 60 years of “independence”

Centre for Just peace and Democracy



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## 60 years of “independence”

### Background

The year 2008 is of particular significance to Sri Lanka. It marks 60 years of post-colonial history and 25 years of armed conflict between the island's principal inhabitants-the Sinhala and Tamil people.

60 years ago when the British departed having "granted" the island (then known as Ceylon) its independence, Ceylon was held up as a model for all the world, of the way in which a colony might peacefully and by easy stages attain full independence without suffering those communal tensions that, for example, severed Pakistan from the Republic of India.

But, today, the island has been devastated by one of the bloodiest wars in modern times. The war is the direct consequence of an armed uprising by the Tamil people in a quest for independence from the Sinhala dominated Governments which had replaced the British.

During the first three decades, the Tamil demand for self-rule was confined to non-violent methods and autonomy within a united country. During the next 30 years, the conflict became progressively violent as the next generation of Tamils resorted to arms demanding external self-determination.

Until 1983, the armed rebellion was limited to a relatively small number of militant youth. The low intensity conflict erupted into war when anti-Tamil violence was unleashed in an attempt to suppress the militancy.

According to Sri Lankan historian K M de Silva, the anti-Tamil violence of 1983 was “*a fateful moment in Sri Lanka's political life that has had repercussions on the country that few other events of this century have had*”.

All attempts to resolve the conflict through negotiations and agreements since 1957 have failed. Instead, the conflict has become even more intractable over the years.

A review of the root causes, a re-evaluation of failed negotiations/agreements and the recognition of ground realities may help to provide fresh insights into different perspectives.

It is proposed that during 2008, academics, activists and researchers from Sri Lanka, the Tamil Diaspora and the International Community are invited to contribute papers that will help reach a nuanced understanding of the history of the conflict.

### Aim

The aim is to produce a series of papers from early 2008 that will help reach a nuanced understanding of the history of the conflict.

### Objectives

- To understand the protracted nature of the conflict and explore new trajectories for conflict resolution in Sri Lanka
- To explore possible ways in which the protagonists/contenders can reach consensus

### Methodology

It is proposed that the project is conducted in 3 phases:

### Phase 1:

To invite a small but representative group of academics, activists and researchers from Sri Lanka, the Tamil Diaspora and the International Community to review the 60 year history of 'post independence' period and identify critical events/issues that require further exploration by a wider group.

During phase 1, the 'small' group will agree on

- Critical areas for further exploration
- Terms of reference to address these areas by academics, activists and researchers in phase 2.
- Tentative list of potential contributors for phase 2.

### Phase 2:

To seek contributions reflecting perspectives from a wide group of academics/activists/researchers from Sri Lanka, the Tamil Diaspora and the International Community on the topics identified in phase 1 of the project.

### Phase 3

The papers to be published in book format

### **Output**

Publications by CJPDP on the above topics to be made available on CJPDP websites and in printed versions.

### **Anticipated Outcome**

Contribution towards a nuanced understanding of the conflict from different perspectives that can help formulate practical approach by the parties and international actors to forge a durable peace.