

# Briefing Notes

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*Civil society groups gathered in Colombo on 17 August 2017 to call upon the government to implement the democratic and human rights agenda of January 2015.*

## **TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE & CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM: SRI LANKA AT THE CROSS ROADS**

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## INTRODUCTION

With less than two years to the next Presidential election, Sri Lanka is facing one of the most serious political crisis in recent times. In the Local Government elections in February 2018, the party of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa secured the majority of votes in many constituencies, pointing towards a possible political shift. Sri Lanka is now at the crossroads, with looming uncertainty.

The expectations of reconciliation, protection of human rights and accountability in Sri Lanka were based on bi-partisan politics in the South, the willingness of the Tamil polity to find a negotiated political solution and a strong civil society. The post-2015 developments paved the way for establishing checks and balances in form of Independent Commissions and provided a democratic space for the people. Today, however, all these developments and factors that propelled change have come under threat due to the political instability, following the Local Government elections.

On one hand, the much defeated corrupt and suppressive forces led by Rajapaksa threaten to capture power on the basis of Sinhala nationalism. On the other hand, the ruling coalition which came to power on the promise of democratisation, justice, and accountability is being disintegrated.



*When anti- Muslim violence erupted in the first week of March, civil society groups organised a picketing campaign in Colombo calling for the government to act decisively against the hate mongers and expressing solidarity with the affected Muslims in Kandy district. Photo: ©SLB*



## POLITICAL CLIMATE

Differences between the two coalition partners of the Government have become issues with far reaching consequences. Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) headed by President Sirisena and United National Party (UNP) headed by Prime Minister Wickremasinghe have taken up contradictory positions on major political, economic and cultural issues, including transitional justice.

President Rajapaksa now commands the support of 52 out of the 98 Members of the Parliament. He also commands absolute majority of local government bodies. Rajapaksa remains the most popular political leader among the Sinhala Buddhist community and has been mobilising his followers regularly. Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism provides the foundation for his politics.

The ruling coalition did not campaign jointly for an inclusive Sri Lanka. President Sirisena tried to employ Rajapaksa's Sinhala-nationalist and war-triumphalist populist slogans to widen his own base. This strategy backfired as it strengthened Rajapaksa ideology in the country.

## A DIVIDED COUNTRY

The recent anti-Muslim violence that sent shock waves throughout the country is an indication of the increasingly widening ethnic polarization. In past months three minor incidents that should have been brought under control quickly transformed into anti-Muslim violence spreading like wild fires. These xenophobic attacks reached its climax in the first week of March in the district of Kandy. Number of Muslim mosques and hundreds of houses and business places of the innocent Muslims were set on fire by the Sinhala Buddhist extremists while the government and police had become mere onlookers.

At the same time the civil society too remains fragmented on ethnic, political, and social lines. Although certain civil society actors have the power to persuade political authorities collectively, they lack in mobilisation power.

Meanwhile in the North as well as the South, nationalist forces have gained strength mainly due to the Government's inability deliver on its promises of political, social, and economic justice.

In this context, Government of Sri Lanka may not have political will and people's mandate to implement the promises it made on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka.

The challenges before the democratic forces in Sri Lanka today are, therefore, immense and decisive. International Community too needs to have a fresh look at the developing situation and focus the collective effort on strengthening protection of human rights, furthering reconciliation and ensuring accountability in Sri Lanka.

## TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN SRI LANKA: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

After coming into power in 2015, Sri Lanka's Unity Government made numerous commitments to implement transitional justice (TJ) and devised a TJ process that consists of an Office of Missing Persons (OMP), a mechanism for reparation, a Truth Commission and a judicial mechanism. In the consensus Resolution A/HRC/30/L.29 adopted at the 30th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Sri Lanka made a commitment to implement a comprehensive TJ process.

The progress of the TJ process has been limited to the OMP. All other mechanisms have not been implemented and the results of the recently concluded Local Government elections indicate some sort of rejection of the TJ process and of the ongoing constitutional reform process. The party led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa dominated the polls in the vast majority of Sinhala Buddhist constituencies in the South by reviving majoritarian Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, opposing the devolution of power and promoting impunity for war-related human rights violations. This has the potential to reverse the democratic gains Sri Lanka has achieved and derail the TJ process. Therefore, Sri Lanka is at the crossroads between democracy and authoritarianism.

### RETURN OF MAJORITARIAN POLITICS



*The Sinhalese mob led by few Buddhist monks went on rampage in Digana attacking and burning Muslim houses and shops. Photo: HDO, Kandy*

The local government election<sup>1</sup> results show a lack of understanding among the Sinhala Buddhist community of the TJ process and the need for reconciliation and accountability.

In the South, the apparent standstill of the constitutional reform process, the rising cost of living and large-scale corruption are causes of grave dissatisfaction. The leaders of the former regime and de-facto winners of the local government elections have been accused of financial crimes, violations of human rights, as well as criminal offences, and yet, they have never been charged for all these offences. This has resulted in the perception among the public that these allegations are false which now challenges and threatens the TJ and reconciliation process in Sri Lanka.



In the North and East, the prolonged absence of justice for the families of disappeared, the inaction against perpetrators of war-related atrocities, the absence of reparations and the continued discrimination against minorities has caused great disappointment. This resulted in some Tamil political groups to campaign for moving the TJ issues from the UNHRC to the agenda of the UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court. Such demands are very unlikely to happen and will only further polarize political opinions in Sri Lanka.

## **CONTINUED MILITARIZATION**

Resolution A/HRC/30/L.29 envisaged substantial security sector reforms as part of the TJ process, withdrawing security forces in civilian affairs, releasing land held by the military and reducing the military presence in the North and East.

Security forces currently still run hotels, restaurants, kiosks and large farms selling agricultural products at low prices, undermining local farmers and traders. The civilian arm of the military, the Civil Security Department, runs preschools and the military itself is also involved in the Northern educational sector. In addition, security forces still engage in building Buddhist statues and temples in the Tamil dominated North and despite releasing some land, they still hold large areas of land belonging to the Tamil people. This means that the military presence in the North remains high. For example, in the district of Mullativu the ratio of people to military is 2:1<sup>2</sup> and the GOSL has not contested this data.

Finally, heightened surveillance and increased intimidation of human rights activists have been reported in the North. This situation hinders the TJ process and obstructs trust-building among the Tamil population.



## POOR LIVING STANDARDS



*Children of the war affected families face in many cases extreme poverty.*

According to Sri Lanka's Poverty Head Count Index only 4.1% of the population lives below the poverty line of USD 30/month<sup>3</sup> which as such is an unrealistic figure. Actual poverty, however, is much higher: poor income levels are prevalent across the country but are felt harshly in the North and East where infrastructure is poor and the overall economic development is low. Micro-finance companies exploit poor families in the North and target especially women as lenders, collecting daily and weekly repayments with excessive interest rates up to 300%.<sup>4</sup>

Ex-LTTE combatants still face high unemployment rates, social stigma, disabilities due to battle field injuries, poor educational qualifications and poor mental stability. Hence, they still live in poverty with limited means of income generation. For example, many are unable to obtain loans promised by the Government due to the absence and unwillingness of government officers to stand surety and due to other restrictions.<sup>5</sup>

Even in the Sinhalese dominated North Central Province, poor income levels and food shortages<sup>6</sup> remain, among others, due to the two-year-long drought. Overall, the Government has failed to implement long-term programs aimed at uplifting the economic conditions, causing major distress among the population. This may have contributed to the local election set-back of the governing coalition and pushed the TJ and reconciliation process out of the public attention.

Complaints over rising living costs and grievances over poverty and poor living conditions surpass the demands for transitional justice and reconciliation.

## RESISTANCE BY STATE OFFICIALS

State officers politically appointed during the previous regime still function within the state machinery and operate along the political party divide, contributing to the continuous politicization of the public service. Bribery and favoritism by state officials remain common at the local level.

Language discrimination against Tamil speaking people remains, manifesting itself, among others, in empty language help desks and Sinhala only sign boards. State officials lack awareness about the TJ process and therefore, resistance to this process flows from state institutions and state officials themselves.

## ROLE OF MEDIA



*Sri Lanka's media is polarized along ethnic, as well as along language lines.*

Media institutions are politically affiliated and TV News are still the main avenue of information dissemination. In the absence of fair and balanced media and an objective analysis of current affairs, the TJ process is mainly portrayed as an effort to “punish war heroes”. Politically controlled state media has lost credibility and cannot influence public opinion decisively anymore.

Dominant media institutions of all language streams provide one-sided reporting and misinformation, thereby widening the ethnic divide in the country. A multilingual media institution that can speak and transfer the same message to all language communities alike is missing.

Transitional justice issues are not communicated and explained well to the public. Jargon and unfamiliar terminology prevail across the different language media and render the implementation of TJ process more difficult.



## GROWING ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENTS

Anti-Muslim sentiments has heightened and multiple violent attacks on mosques and Muslim-owned businesses<sup>7</sup> has continued throughout the year: For example, in May 2017, a mob led by Buddhist monks attacked the Muslim village Selva Nagar, claiming 49 acres of land as a Buddhist archeological site.<sup>8</sup> Another example is a minor road accident in Ginthota (Galle district) in November 2017 which led to a series of anti-Muslim communal attacks<sup>9</sup> at a time when the victims of the anti-Muslim communal violence in Aluthgama (2014) are still waiting for justice and compensation.

Generally, anti-Muslim messaging is rampant on Facebook and Islamophobic myths, particularly referring to attempts of the Muslim community to cause infertility in Sinhalese by using 'infertility causing additives' in food<sup>10</sup> and smearing 'infertility causing substances' in underwear, are commonly treated as truth. This has led to increasing anti-Muslim sentiments and sparked occasionally further violence.

The Government has failed so far to address this growing anti-Muslim hatred which hampers the TJ and reconciliation process.



*Social media were used by extremists to propagate Islamophobic narratives that led to ethnic violence.  
Cartoon: @Namal Amarasinghe*

## RESULTS OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The party led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), dominated the polls at the recently concluded Sri Lanka's Local Government Election. With 44.65% of the total votes polled, the SLPP secured a lead in 231 out of 338 Local Government (LG) bodies, i.e. slightly above two third. This is a clear setback for the present government and on the transitional justice (TJ) process which has direct relevance to UNHRC Resolution A/HRC/30/L.29 on Sri Lanka.

The elections were held on the 10th February 2018 for 338 LG bodies and the voter turnout was registered above 65%. The election piloted a form of Mixed Member Proportional System that was newly introduced under the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act, No. 16 of 2017 which also introduced a mandatory 25% quota for women in the LG bodies.

### Local Authority Election, Sri Lanka 2018: position of the major parties

Major alliances and parties	Votes	%	Seats	Local Authorities
Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna	4,941,952	44.65%	3,369	231
United National Party	3,612,259	32.63%	2,385	34
United People's Freedom Alliance	989,821	8.94%	674	2
Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna	693,875	6.27%	431	0
Sri Lanka Freedom Party	491,835	4.44%	358	7
Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi	339,675	3.07%	407	41

*Source: News media and election commission website.*

The United National Party (UNP) led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe came second in terms of cumulative votes and polled with 32.63% of votes. President Maithripala Sirisena's led United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA - 8.94%) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP- 4.4%) together polled 13.43%.

Division, even hostility, between the two coalition partners was apparent during the months leading up to the election, with the President being rather vocal in his condemnation of the UNP. The campaigning of the election as characterized by: the treasury bond scam which took place allegedly with the involvement of UNP; numerous failures by the government to deliver on the major promises based on which the 2015 win was secured, including economic revival, the abolition of executive presidency and other constitutional reforms; and lack of progress in the investigations into and prosecution of financial crimes and high-profile cases of killings and disappearances during the previous regime.



*Rajapaksa, being a seasoned political campaigner, used narrow nationalist and war triumphalist ideology as his basic election slogans.*

The Rajapaksa campaign focused, among others, on glorifying the war victory, on accusing the Unity Government of “dividing the country”<sup>11</sup> through power sharing and on challenging the authorities to convict the Rajapaksas of the alleged financial crimes. It also characterized the engagement with the UN as a servitude to the West.

In the absence of a strategy of the Unity Government to communicate comprehensively to the people their efforts on constitutional reforms, reconciliation and transitional justice, the Rajapaksa campaign was successful in appealing to the nationalist sentiments of the Sinhala Buddhist voters. The implications of this election result are not favorable for the TJ process: especially the Sinhala nationalist forces could argue that there is no Sinhalese mandate to pursue TJ and this will cause the decline of political will to be committed to TJ process.

## EMERGING ELECTION PATTERNS

Compared with the Presidential and Parliamentary polls of 2015, there is not much of a difference when looking just at the numbers: in the 2015 Presidential Election, Rajapaksa polled 47.6% and in the Parliamentary Election his party, the UPFA, polled 42.7%. At the recent Local Government Elections Rajapaksa-led SLPP polled 44.65% of the votes, pointing to the fact that his party has generally the support of around 45%.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the non-Rajapaksa vote shows little fluctuation: the vote share for the non-Rajapaksa voters was around 51.3%. In the January 2015 Presidential Election Maithripala Sirisena as the common candidate polled 51.3% and in the August 2015 Parliamentary Election the non-Rajapaksa vote, including that of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), was 55.3%.

The combined votes of UNP, UPFA and SLFP, however, stood at 41.5% on the 10th February 2018, recording a drop of 4.2% from what the combination polled in the August 2015 Parliamentary Elections. One of the key reasons for this change may have been some people refraining from voting and/or voting for alternative parties or independent groups in protest. In any case, the LG Election results are a clear indication of the erosion of public support and confidence in the current Unity Government.

## ETHNIC DIMENSIONS



*Northern voters have sent a strong message to the dominant Tamil mainstream party, the TNA.*

The Rajapaksa-led SLPP did best in the predominantly Sinhalese-Buddhist districts and especially in the Southern rural areas. For example, in the districts of Moneragala, Matara and Galle over 50% of votes and in Hambantota 49.96% were polled for SLPP. According to the most recent statistics, these districts are the top four districts with the largest Sinhalese majorities.

In the Northern districts, the SLPP performed feebly, gaining 1.08% of votes in Jaffna, 3.67% in Mannar, 0.75% in Kilinochchi, 9.39% in Vavuniya and 4.08% in Mullativu.<sup>13</sup> The Southern Sinhalese voters appeared to have renewed their support for a majoritarian Sri Lanka by voting for Rajapaksa who called upon voters to use the polls as a “de-facto referendum” on the Unity Government’s constitutional reform process, which he warned, was the “gateway to federalism”.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the above figures, the Tamil nationalist parties won the majority of seats in the North. Notably however, the TNA, which had provided backing to the ruling coalition despite its failure to deliver on key pledges, was numerically successful but short of a majority in all Councils across the North.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe’s led UNP did better in the urban areas and especially in the ethnically mixed areas. The Colombo Municipal Council with around 400’000 voters, of whom about 60% belong to ethnic minorities, voted 46% for the UNP and 21% for the SLPP.

## THE FUTURE OF THE UNITY GOVERNMENT AND PROSPECTS OF THE TJ PROCESS

After one week of uncertainty, President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe agreed to work together for the next two years. The Government’s main focus will be on economic issues and on ending impunity for the corruption and individual killings during the era of the Rajapaksa regime. In order to continue on the reform process it is of utmost importance that the two leaders, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and President Sirisena, renew their commitments to unity, based on the 2015 mandate.

## THE MISSING LINK

The noticeable missing link in almost all Southern-based post-election analyses on the election setback of the Government is the non-implementation of the TJ process and the failure to address the Tamil people's grievances. The absence of these two issues in the post-election discourse means that focus of the post-LG political orientation of the government will be elsewhere. In political pragmatism transitional justice is a non-starter for both coalition partners of the government as there are only two years remain before presidential and general elections.



*Transitional Justice, which includes finding the truth, is completely missing in the post- local government election discourse in the South of Sri Lanka.*

## THE PEOPLE'S VOICE: REVISITING THE NORTH

Two years ago, Sri Lanka Brief visited war affected people in the North of Sri Lanka. Among them were mothers waiting to hear about their disappeared sons and daughters, ex-combatants who were trying to rebuild their lives and persons who had become disabled due to war. Their views and opinions on the prevailing situation, their hopes and expectations were published in SLB No 12. In order to find out the changes that have taken place during last two years, Sri Lanka Brief visited the same people in late July 2017 again. This section of SLB No 13 provides now a comparison of the situation, then and now in their own words.

### SELVARASA RASAMANI (A GRANDMOTHER)



#### 2015

(63 years) “When we were displaced in 2009, we went to Pudumathalan:

It was 10th March 2016. Around 5 am in the morning, I walked to the well about 50 meters away to wash my face. Then there was a shell attack on our tent. Thus, my only son died on my lap. My daughter-in-law and two grandchildren had died instantly. I stayed there alongside four dead bodies until noon.

I am a disabled person, so I get LKR 3’000 per month as disability allowance from the Government. The Samurdhi Programme gives another LKR 1’000 a month. As there is no other income I live from hand to mouth.”

#### 2017

(65 years) “Why do they do this to me? The government stopped the Samurdhi allowance I was receiving. This government has not provided any relief to me or our family. There is no water in our wells. Previously, a bowser came to fill the wells. Now that too has stopped. I asked for help to construct a water tank, no help came.

How can I survive like this?



## KARUNAKARAN MANJULADEVI (6 PERSONS LOST IN THE FAMILY)



### 2015

(42 years) “Selvarasa Rasamani is my mother. We too were displaced due to war. As everyone who was on the run in Vanni, we too ended up in the government designated No Fire Zone in Pudukmathalan. We had 8 children, two girls and 6 boys. War devoured 6 of them. As the military was advancing, LTTE retreated.

Military separated us from our male children. Uniformed soldiers loaded all the injured civilians in to a tractor and took them away. I saw my son, Karunakaran Kanthadas (18) injured by a shell, in the tractor. I tried to run towards him, but I was stopped. There were about 40 other young people in it. That was the last time I saw my son. The son of my sister-in-law was also there. He disappeared, too.”

### 2017

(44 years) “Now I attend clinics run by the Red Cross. I make food my son loved to eat and share them with other mothers at the clinic. We are 15 mothers, all of us have our sons or daughters disappeared. These counselling sessions give me some sort of relief. Although only 15 of us go to the clinic there are many more mothers looking for their loved ones. We do not know anything about the OMP. We have not heard any good news about our disappeared sons or daughters. Most of us have depression. Although it is temporary, counselling is a good thing. I don’t know whether the government will ever find my son, but we remain hopeful.

My daughter now works in a garment factory. Her husband - he was from another town - left her because we could not afford to give a dowry. He pays no maintenance for the child.

We still remain destitute and abandoned.”

## THIYAGARAJA MARYPUSHPAN (A MOTHER WHO LOST 3 SONS)



### 2015

(55 years) “We had three boys and a girl.

We were caught between the LTTE and the military. On 20th February 2009, LTTE forcibly recruited my son Thiyagaraja Prathap, who was 18 years old. My son died within 10 days. My husband Navamani Thiyagaraja and my two sons Thiyagaraja Pradeep and Thiyagaraja Praveen surrendered to the military. They walked towards the military and that is the last time I saw them. I do not want death certificates or compensation because I believe they are alive.”

### 2017

(57 years) “We have been on a fast on a rotating basis in Mullathivu for 3 months with no response from the government. Officials tell us to accept the certificates of the missing. We do not want them. Some may take it. A Member of Parliament told us that accepting the certificate will enable us to get financial compensation. But what happens if we find our children after that?

It seems our destiny is to live like the dead and finally die ourselves. We cannot trust this government any more. They only talk.”





## ASHOK MITHILA (AN EX – LTTE COMBATANT)



### 2015

(25 years) “After I was released we came here to my parents’ village and built a little house. Before 2015, military intelligence officers came almost every month to see my husband. We collected money and sent my husband to Saudi Arabia to work. Intelligence officers have taken his telephone number in Saudi Arabia. He still does not have a job.

Still our rights depend on the willingness of the Sinhalese majority. This is not fair. If we can live as equals, not dominated by the Sinhalese, we can live in one country. The OMP is good. But we need truth. Both sides have done wrong things. Accept, apologise, forgive and move on. That is the only way.”

### 2017

(27 years) “The military intelligence officers do not visit us anymore. The good news is that my husband found a job in Saudi Arabia and he has started sending LKR 30’000 a month. We receive monthly donation for my two children’s education.<sup>15</sup>

We have not been able to finish the house that we started to build and we still live in the same hut.

Now banks send their letter on instalments in all three languages but this does not mean that there is no discrimination against Tamils.

One positive development is that Tamils can now go anywhere in the country. I too have been to Colombo to attend a garment workers’ meeting although I do not have a job. As we were never given a vocational training in the rehabilitation camps, people like us can only do laborer work.

In our society, female former LTTE cadres face many problems when it comes to starting a family. Men expects a dowry of one million rupees and gold jewelry worth another half a million. This demand is impossible to fulfil for poor girls and their families.

I have not heard any news on the OMP or any mechanism to find the truth. I do not know what transitional justice is. Same is true for the new Constitution. Nobody tells us anything. I do not know what will happen. We just wait. It seems as if everyone has left us to our destiny. Nobody cares about our life.”

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## SIDAMBARAPULLAI SINNADORAI (A WAR DISABLED PERSON)



### 2015

(44 years) “By February 2009, I was in Oddusuddan in the No Fire Zone. On 1st February 2009 a shell hit us. I was injured and 25 others were also injured. My spinal code had been damaged.

My medicine costs LKR 10’000 a month. I get LKR 3’000 from the Government as disability allowance. Why are we treated differently from the disabled in the military? I was only a civilian caught in the war. There is no proper plan to help those who were disabled during war. In Nendukerny alone, there are about 200 people disabled due to war.”

### 2017

(46 years) “Nothing has changed for me during the last two years. In this district, people disabled due to war are suffering more than before. Prices of everything have gone up but we still receive the same amount as allowance. What can I do with LKR 3’000 a month? If I do not get any other help, I am a dead man. I do not think that this government has any real concern for Tamil people disabled due to war. Even the Tamil Members of Parliament have not done anything to make our situation better.”



## VIJAYAKUMAR VASANTHAKUMARI (A WAR DISABLED PERSON)



### 2015

(35 years) “My husband disappeared in 2008. We had no children. I was injured in a shell attack in May 2009.

I lost one eye and my arm was injured. One of my legs got shortened. Still there are a number of shell pieces in my body. I am 90% disabled. I cannot be in the sun nor do physical work.”

### 2017

(37 years) “This government even stopped the 350 Rupees I received as a monthly poverty alleviation allowance. I went to the local government office, but they did not give me any reason why they stopped. I cannot help my two sons to dress properly to go to school. We do not get any Samurdhi allowance.

When do we get a proper support to start a life of our own? I really do not know... Not only us, this whole village lives in poverty.”

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
LG	Local Government
LKR	Sri Lanka Rupees
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
OMP	Office of Missing Persons
PM	Prime Minister
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLPP	Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna
TJ	Transitional Justice
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNP	United National Party
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance

## ENDNOTES

- 1 One section of SLB No. 13 will focus on the local government election results in relation to the TJ process.
- 2 <http://adayaalam.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Normalising-the-Abnormal-The-Militarisation-of-Mullaitivu.pdf>
- 3 The poverty line is calculated at an amount of LKR 4'584/ month (approx. USD 30/month); see Department of Census and Statistics Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2016).  
[http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/Poverty%20Indicators\\_2016.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/Poverty%20Indicators_2016.pdf)
- 4 <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/171015/business-times/micro-finance-blamed-for-rising-indebtedness-in-north-263653.html>
- 5 <http://www.ceylontoday.lk/print20170401CT20170630.php?id=35460>
- 6 <https://www.yamu.lk/blog/2017s-drought-and-what-it-means-to-sri-lanka>
- 7 <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2017/05/sri-lanka-anti-muslim-attacks-rise-buddhist-leader-stokes-tension/#7hKajVKMVG5UPgtM.97>
- 8 <http://groundviews.org/2017/05/22/escalating-violence-renewed-assaults-on-the-muslim-community/>
- 9 <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/anti-muslim-assaults-in-gintota/>
- 10 <http://groundviews.org/2017/07/04/disinformation-in-sri-lanka-an-overview/>
- 11 See TNA leader R.Sampanthan's speech <http://srilankabrief.org/2018/02/eelam-will-bloom-not-on-account-of-tna-bur-on-account-of-rajapaksas-lotus-bud-sampanthan/>
- 12 Source: mainstream media reports in Sri Lanka.
- 13 Election commission, Sri Lanka <https://election.news.lk/>
- 14 See press release issued Mahinda Rajapaksa <http://lankanewsweb.net/news/press-release/item/7171-the-proposal-for-a-new-constitution>
- 15 After SLB No 12 which featured Mithila's story, a philanthropist family in Colombo commenced a monthly donation to support the two children's education.



The prime cause of the trouble is ...

“[...] I do want to pose the question as to whether such incidents [violence against minorities in Sri Lanka] happening intermittently and frequently are indicative of a purely law and order situation or is there a deeper dimension to it? To what extent is the role of the State responsible from the point of view of the deeper dimension? Are all citizens in this country treated as equals? Do all of them have justice on the basis of equality under the present structure of the State? Does the structure of governance in this country, as the State is presently constituted, not have an impact on the behaviour of different citizens belonging to different communities?

It is my submission, [...] that such incidents are not purely a law and order situation. There is a much deeper dimension. Some people feel that they are superior and that the others must submit themselves to such superiority. This must be eradicated. I think that is the prime cause of the trouble.”

*From the speech made by Hon R. Sampanthan, leader of the opposition and TNA in Parliament, on 6 March 2018 referring to the recent anti – Muslim violence.*