

Right to Life Human Rights Centre

Strategic Plan

2017 - 2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

Right to Life Human Rights Center (Right to Life) is a Sri Lankan human rights organization working towards the long-term democratization and political and social transformation with respect for rule of law, equality and the dignity of all persons in the country. The work of the organization is anchored in our history and experience of rights activism, mobilization, networking and advocacy in support of victims and their families in their fight for redress and justice.

Right to Life's work and future strategy is guided by practical lessons from many years of experience in Sri Lanka working at all levels from community-based action to national and international advocacy. Under this strategic plan, Right to Life will work with victim survivors, Human Rights Defenders, other Human Rights organizations and government mechanisms, to bring justice and relief to victims, as well as positive and sustainable changes in policies and practices. This strategic plan is informed by and reflects the organization's strategic goals, vision, mission and values.

2. THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN

Since the political background relevant to the Strategic Plan we developed for 2014 - 2016 has changed by now, since through this change there have been considerable changes in civil society activity, and since the new government has already commenced democratic reforms, within the present political background there is need for a strategic plan for us for our future activity. Attention was paid here to the following matters:

- 1 Preventing the government from becoming racist again
- 2 Activity for eliminating racist ideologies and to affirm humanist ideologies in society.
- 3 In order to prevent human rights violations including torture and extra judicial killings, engage in legal, policy, attitudinal and structural changes and reforms.
- 4 Productive relationships between the government and civil society based on human rights principles, productive development.

3. STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Several workshops were held with the participation of staff members during the end of the year 2015 and the earlier half of 2016 for planning the strategic direction' A problem analysis was done based on the political, legal and social contexts and how the issues identified within the present context can change during the next three years was discussed with a view to analyse the future situation. A special one-day workshop was held for staff members and local actors in order to identify how to link with government stakeholders in our interventions within the present political context. An internal examination was done to identify organizational strengths and the sectors that should be improved.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

4.1. History of the Organization

Initially operating under the name "Kalape Api", the organization started its work in 1992. The organization went through many challenges and eventually registered as Right to Life Human Rights Center - a Non-Profit Organization under the Companies Act No. 07 of 2007, registration G.A. 323, in 2002.

In year 1991, the commemoration of the kidnapping and killing of Mr. H. M. Ranjith, a worker at the Free Trade Zone and his labour law consultant Mr. L. Lionel took place for the first time. An event to commemorate the disappeared has since been organized on the 27th of October every year.

"Kalape Api" organization was then formed in year 1992 with the objective of achieving five core demands that included salaries, work environment and disappearances etc. and working in collaboration with the "Athurudahanwuwange Mapiya Doodaru Sangamaya" (Association of the Family Members of the Disappeared) and "Maw Peramuna" (Mothers' Front) organizations was initiated during the 1992-1993 period.

Activities related to legal rights of workers are continued through the "Kalape Api" which advocates on legal action required to be taken on behalf of those who have been ousted from their places of work. Hivos has been funding this endeavor continuously for six years now.

The Workers' Committee that was established and was functioning between 1996 and 1998 attempted to supervise the actions of the fulltime activists of the organization, signaling the first uprising within “Kalape Api” which ultimately resulted in having to close the office that had been established in Katunayake. With “Kalape Api” being registered and run as a separate organization by a group of members connected to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, while those who had allegiance to the New Samasamaja Party were operating separately under “Kalape Api Collaboration”, the organization reached a turning point.

In year 2000, the “Kalape Api Collaboration” took steps to take legal action against the harassment and cruel treatment faced by workers of North Pole Company, Ja Ela and Ceylon Green Elevators company and to establish a memorial at the Raddoluwa Junction, Seeduwa to commemorate the disappeared.

As a result of the ideological struggle within the Organization relating to the strategy adopted for mobilizing which focused on going beyond traditional methods, inclusive of the need to reach beyond advocating only for the rights of workers and advocate for all democratic space and human rights, a group of members defected from the “Kalape Api Collaboration” and formed Right to Life Human Rights Centre.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) located in Hong Kong offered to grant funds for the basic requirements of Right to Life in year 2002 and their contribution continued to fund the Organization for six consecutive years.

In year 2004, the “People's Alliance against Torture” was launched in Sri Lanka as a special programme opposing torture with the collaboration of the Asian Human Rights Commission. As a result of this programme, activism against torture was further strengthened with the widespread public awareness campaign and publicity on the Prevention of Torture Act no. 22 of 1994 which influenced the Attorney General to file cases under this Act. It was further possible to exert influence on the authorities to activate the Human Rights, Police and Public Services Commissions creating another turning point in the history of the Organization.

In year 2006, a few more organizations joined Right to Life's activism under the themes of forced disappearances and torture.

An alliance was formed against all forms of disappearances with 17 more organizations in year 2007 and the Organization participated in various activities that were carried out against the disappearances that were taking place in the North and the East. In the meantime, with the killing of Gerard Mervin Perera in 2004 and Sugath Nishantha in 2006. who were victims of torture and were taking legal

action, the Organization came to terms with the ultimate realization that wider reforms are needed and that believing in the process carried out at the courts of law alone to serve justice is not realistic. Having realized that mobilizing workers amidst such a restrictive context is difficult, the Organization disengaged from action of that nature.

Under the oppressive conditions that were prevalent in year 2008, the decision was taken to be united in order to face the prevailing conditions. Action was taken in collaboration with other groups to make the independent commissions active.

In 2009 Right to Life Human Rights Centre took the initiative to form a network of civil society organizations called “Platform for Freedom”, and “Veediye Virodaya” (Street Protest) in 2014 to address the rising political challenges in Sri Lanka, during different political phases of the country. The Platform for Freedom mainly focused on the themes of freedom of speech and expression and the right to life, while Veediye Virodaya focused on Democratic & Constitution reforms. The “Veediye Virodaya” civil society coalition prepared a comprehensive set of reform proposals covering 15 thematic areas, including torture, extra-judicial killings and disappearances through a consultative and collaborative process, which were submitted to the then opposition political parties in 2013.

A commemoration parallel to the international commemoration of the disappeared was carried out in Vavuniya on 30th August 2011 for the first time. Further, a combined report on Sri Lanka was submitted for the first time to the United Nations Torture Committee with the collaboration of 9 key organizations and two representatives of the Organization also participated in this Committee.

The opportunity to join hands with the groups from the North and the East with regard to the subject matter of disappearances dawned in year 2012.

Upon analysis of the history of the Organization, it is evident that the Right to Life initially operated in the spheres of action against disappearances and torture and later was oriented towards the expansion of the democratic space and human rights.

4.2. Current Status of the Organization

Right to Life has engaged in awareness raising, advocacy campaigns against torture and disappearances at the local, regional, national and international levels, through advancing the rule of law. Organizational interventions include provision of legal aid to victims of torture, conducting awareness programs in villages through victims, street campaigns to raise public awareness, training and organizing victims and youth to become human rights defenders, and the production of media publications on human rights issues.

Internationally, Right to Life has been working very closely with the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), Rehabilitation and research Centre for Torture victims (RCT), and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT), Management Systems International's (MSI) Support for Professional and Intuitional Capacity Enhancement (SPICE) Project & Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (NTT).

5. EXTERNAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS

5.1. Political Context

Sri Lanka has faced two youth uprisings in the South in 1971 and 1987-1989. The country has also been plunged into civil war for twenty six years between the state and Tamil militants since 1983, which was brought to a decisive military defeat in 2009. The state used judicial, legislative and military mechanisms to deal with these uprisings in a punitive manner. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), Emergency Regulations (ER) and the torture, were instruments of state used by successive governments over a long period of time to crush dissent. Thousands lost their lives, were displaced and lived in camps or with friends and family. In addition, thousands also disappeared without trace. By the end of the war in 2009, the military apparatus was also used to control land and the economic sphere. The judiciary and administrative structures were highly politicized.

Sri Lanka witnessed a dramatic change in the political sphere in 2015 following the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. The operational environment is more conducive for civil society activism, and it is an opportune time for the consolidation of democratic gains and greater civic engagement in governance. The receptive operational space and recognition has given civil society an active role in governance and the reconciliation processes.

If the current political combination of the two main parties acting within a national unity government is successful and continued, durable solutions for governance and reconciliation will be reached. However, if the national unity government is destabilized, racism and religious extremism will re-emerge, the reform processes will be halted, and durable solutions for reconciliation will be delayed.

5.2. Legal Context

With the adoption of the 19th amendment to the Constitution, independent commissions have been established. The government has promised to ratify the optional protocol to the Convention Against Torture (CAT).

The new government inter alia is working towards ensuring a reconciliation process within a transitional justice framework consisting truth seeking, justice, reparation and non-recurrence. This includes the establishment and operationalizing of a Truth Commission, Office of Missing Persons (OMP), special judicial mechanisms, an office for reparations as well as several confidence-building measures. The government has also embarked on a Constitutional reform exercise.

Following the change in Government in 2015, there is a visible independence in the judiciary in comparison to the previous system. Magistrates and the police seem to be more independent, and speedy investigations are conducted in relation to special cases.

5.3. Social Context

The new political situation has also ensured several key processes with citizen's participation. For example, in order to ensure that some of the mechanisms and institutions that are to be set up reflect the needs and aspirations of the people, the government has established a process of public consultations through The Public Representations Committee on Constitutional Reform and the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms. These processes are conducted across the island providing an opportunity for citizens to make written or oral submissions. However, the processes have been fraught with challenges, not least the Colombo-centric elite point-of-view having a greater voice, than those who are marginalised.

If the reforms and current political ethos of the Government continues, we expect an increase in public trust and confidence in the government structure, the judiciary and rule of law and a decrease in negative attitudes about the police. However in the absence of clear political will, independence of the media will decrease over time posing a direct challenge to this Government's democratic project. Further, if there is no constructive solution to address the causes of the ethnic conflict, the aspirations of minorities and vulnerable groups, and structural inequality, there will be a resurgence of ethnic tension, racism and nationalism, resulting in further polarization of groups along ethnic/ religious/ economic lines.

The space and opportunity for civil society activism and participation is contingent on a conducive political and social environment. Racism, intolerance and repression of dissent would damage the fabric of collaboration between state and civil society, and contribute to polarization within the socio-political, economic, ethnic and religious diversity within the country.

6. VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES

6.1. Vision

A multi ethnic and multi religious society of citizens that protect justice, equality, respect for life

6.2. Mission

To be placed as an active Centre for establishing a society against human rights violations including torture, extra judicial killings, standing for national harmony and democratic reforms

6.3. Values

The Organization in its action will be active on the following values and these values shall be reflected in individual and common actions of the Organization;

- Gender sensitivity

Respect for all forms of gender identities

- Impartiality

When Human Rights violations such as Torture, for example judicial killings or disappearances occur we act impartially without consideration to political party affiliation, ethnicity, caste, religion or status.

- Transparency

Financial and fiduciary transparency in the head office and district networks

- Accountability

Accountability to the community, beneficiary groups, donors and stakeholders

7. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

7.1. Advocating for Justice for Victims of Torture, Related Extra Judicial Killings, Disappearances and Human Rights Violations

Intervening for taking initial legal action and obtaining justice related to basic human rights violations including torture, extra judicial killings will be key. Through this it is also intended to advocate nationally and internationally for getting justice for victims. Implementing the reform proposals in sectors such as the Police, Attorney General and the Judiciary for prevention of torture, as well as influencing the government to sign the alternative protocol especially against torture and practically perform government activities according to these Conventions;

Formalizing the investigations of the Human Rights Commission and the Police Commission, complete hearing of complaints within a short period of time, giving equitable recommendations and, presenting suggestions on procedures for compulsory implementation of these recommendations. Ensuring that these institutions implement these with accountability and effectively through continuous monitoring of these actions and forwarding reports on same. Similarly it also includes making official links at national and district level with these Commissions and creating public awareness on the importance and the role of these independent Commissions.

Following recommendations of the Committee Against Torture (CAT), advocating for zero tolerance of torture collectively, and creating an active discourse that not being tortured is a non-derogable right as a citizen will be focused on.

7.2. Victim and Community Action Against Human Rights Violations Including Torture And Extra-Judicial Killings

This includes information collection relating to basic human rights violations including torture, extra judicial killings, provision of educational and legal assistance needed for action building against Police torture, educational programs and activities based on social communication media especially for addressing students and youth activists as well as, formation of a group of actors who will be active at local level on human rights violations and torture.

7.3. Fostering Democracy, Independence of the Judiciary, Human Rights, Rule of Law and Accountability through a New Constitution and Judicial Reform

An accountable, judicial system will ensure that human rights of citizen's is protected. To this end, the required judicial reforms and institutional changes will be advocated for. In addition, Right to Life Human Rights Centre will advocate for a new Constitution which protects, promotes and safeguards the rights of all people within the country. Finding democratic solutions through power sharing and a suitable institutional mechanism that reflects the sovereignty of the people is to be advocated.

7.4. Building a People's Movement and Civil Society Coalition for Resolving Ethnic Conflict through Constitutional Reform

Building a civil society integration and working to strengthen it for building a People's Movement that will stand and work for democracy and the reforms needed for it. Creating a group of people that will intervene practically for increasing public understanding on reforms achieved and obtaining such reforms. Also, in place of conservative views established in society, affirm progressive views especially about ethnic harmony, human rights, and action of human rights organizations. Through this, it also expects to create community awareness for building public opinion about the new Constitution

7.5. Institutional Learning and Development

This includes paying attention to organizational learning for implementing programs more effectively as well as the knowledge and skills development necessary for the staff. Conduct an evaluation of our past actions and launch them as publications, assist in programs that build the capacity of the staff, Improve the knowledge of staff members on media action and the use of media by staff members, and assist in developing knowledge of languages.



8. CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

8.1. Mainstreaming Gender and Diversity

We recognize the gender dynamic in the contributions, perspectives and experience of our staff, and the persons we connect with in the course of our work. Gender identity, whether male, female or transgendered frames are individual experiences and responses to rights and citizenship. We aim to mainstream gender and diversity when identifying needs, designing, implementing, and monitoring all our programmes and advocacy campaigns. We shall respect the diversity of groups that we may encounter when implementing programmes, endeavour to include them, and address gender and diversity issues that may arise while programmes are being implemented.

Particularly in the case of support for victims of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and their families, we are sensitive to the particular experiences and vulnerabilities of men and women. While the majority of torture victims we work with are men, in supporting them for redress and justice we work closely with female family members. We will be sensitive to the gender specific issues faced by these individuals, in order to make it easier to identify and implement meaningful approaches and take action to ensure their rights.

8.2. Media

Our media and communication interventions are a key aspect of our advocacy. The media output contributes to reaching key audiences more efficiently and effectively. We will seek to produce more specific audience oriented messaging, and media output in print and online for multiple audiences – grassroots communities, youth, volunteer activists, policy makers, network partners, other civil society actors, donors and international Human Rights organizations. Through our tri-lingual, print, mainstream and online communications we will aim to create greater awareness around our work, mobilize public support and build a network of like-minded individuals, and target policymakers.

9. PROGRAM APPROACHES

9.1. Engaging with the State and Government Mechanism(Government engagement)

Considering the space available for civil society organizations within the present new political context, critical and constructive engagement with the State and Government mechanism is expected at a minimum in our major programs. We can assist in the reformation process, while confirming our autonomy, based on organizational policies, values and priorities. Here, the nature of intervention should be decided at grass root level within the existing context.

These interventions are primarily for implementing the reforms proposed and for monitoring of such actions. These consist of forwarding our recommendations and proposals that include our positions and demands on policy formulation, affirming that these are implemented at grassroots level and providing the support necessary for it.

Maintaining a continuous relationship with State mechanisms such as the Human Rights Commission, the National Police Commission at national and district levels as well as, through monitoring of actions affirming that the State is accountable for protection and promotion of human rights, are expected through this. We also expect to forward our suggestions for policy formulation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of National Dialogue and in the event we do not get an appropriate space for it we also should keep the opportunity to advocate for it.

9.2. Empowerment of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)

The realization of our outcomes requires inclusive and targeted social mobilization and active citizenship. The long-term goal is to fulfil a range of civil and political rights and needs of our vulnerable target communities. Towards this end, we will focus on enabling a group of grass root activists including victims groups, local human rights defenders and youth groups to realize their potential to promote and protect human rights in their community. These activists will support systematic interventions at the local level, raise awareness and rights consciousness, and form strategic networks within the community, among themselves and other stakeholders at the local and

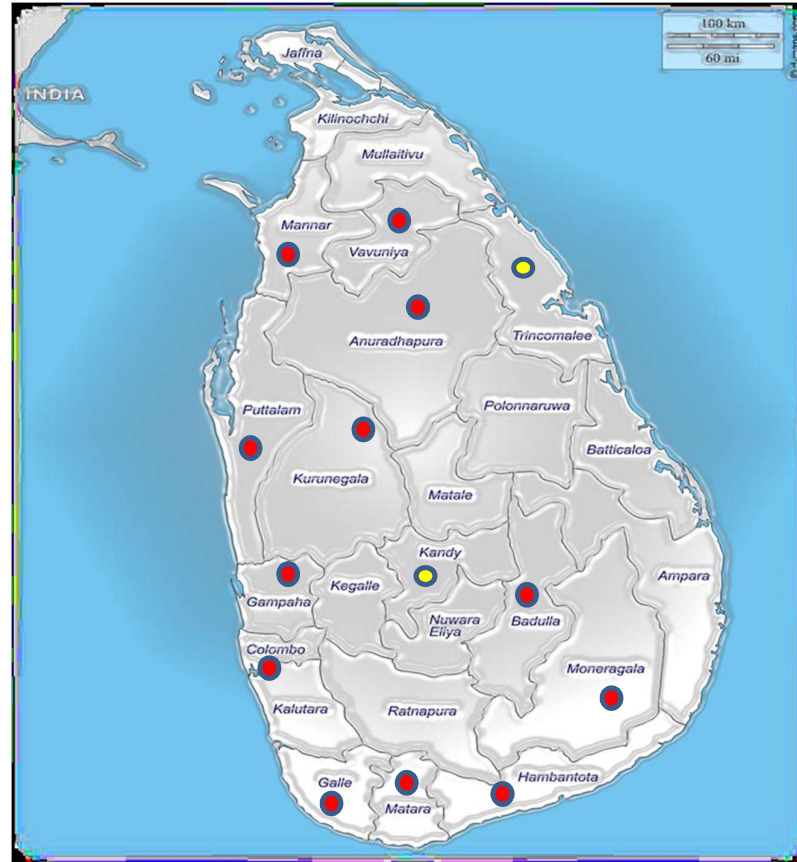
national level. Empowerment through consciousness, awareness and skills building, helps victim groups to sustain the gains made by seeking legal redress for torture or other violations and strive towards achieving greater justice and accountability.

The empowerment approach provides a framework and determines our way of working. We recognize that process is as important as the product to ensure relevant and sustainable impact.

9.3. Networking

Advocacy and networking are intrinsic to the Rights Based Approach adopted by us, and essential to addressing the rights violations, inequitable policies and practices of government. Our human rights campaigns involve networking with local civil society actors and human rights defenders, Trade Unions, youth groups, artists, journalists and media rights activists, religious groups/ leaders as well as international human rights organizations and advocates. Networking provides an opportunity for joint efforts to address context specific issues and challenges. In the past Right to Life Human Rights Centre has taken the initiative as convener and active member in various civil society networks to address rising political challenges in Sri Lanka. We will continue to work towards creating a cohesive and coherent voice for change, and campaign collectively at the national and international level, in furtherance of promoting, protecting and upholding human rights.

10. OUR TARGET AREAS



- R2L Current Working Districts
- R2L Planning to Work

Right to life has worked in the Puttlam, Gampaha, Matara and Hambantota Districts since 2006. We have later expanded the geographic scope of our work to include Kuruneragala, Kandy, Anuradhapura, Vavuniya, Mannar, Badulla, Galle Districts and hope to work in Moneragala in the future.

11. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

