

Sarvodaya – Deshodaya (National Re-awakening) Draft Vision Declaration

This Vision Declaration is the first step towards statement of common vision of Sri Lankans across the country.

It resulted from over a dozen “People’s Forums” that were conducted among a wide spectrum of citizens in the following districts.

Puttalam
Gampaha
Pollonnaruwa
Jaffna
Nuwara Eliya
Ratnapura
Ampara

Each of the “People’s Forums” contained people of all ethnicities, all ages and both genders. The majority (80%) of the participants had no prior relationship with Sarvodaya.

Additional input to this Vision Declaration came from the compilation of 3,000 surveys collected from every district in the country. Participants were drawn from both village and urban communities. They included professional and business people, students, religious leaders, and unemployed people, as well as politicians, military, police, and members of non-state armed groups. Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, and Burgher ethnicities were represented by their proportion of Sri Lanka’s population. All religions were represented as well.

The survey was conducted by the Deshodaya (The National Re-awakening) arm of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. However, the majority of survey participants had no affiliation with the Sarvodaya organization or Sarvodaya villages.

We intend this Vision Declaration as a first step toward common understanding that we hope will contribute to a political solution to the war. What we encourage now is a full discussion, modification and adoption of the Vision Declaration. We encourage you to discuss its contents in your family, village and workplace.

Sarvodaya will at the same time continue its efforts in the spheres of consciousness, economic, and political transformation with the goal of achieving permanent peace. For more information please contact:

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VISION DECLARATION

PREAMBLE:

We Are the People of Sri Lanka.

Our ethnicity and culture includes Buddhists, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Veddas. Our religions include Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. We live in cities, towns and villages. Regardless of our ethnicity, our religion, or our circumstances, we are all Sri Lankans. Our fates are inextricably linked. What affects one of us affects all.

We are United by Our Common Vision.

Our future lies in forging a common vision that includes a better world for all. That is the intention of this Vision Declaration.

We are United by Our Values.

Despite our different religions, there are common values that unite us all. The highest value to which we all hold is Truth and the search for Truth. Our values include the health, security and happiness of all beings. We are guided by wisdom and moved by compassion. We seek a wise, enlightened and awakened society.

We are United by Our Shared Pain and Suffering.

All Sri Lankans in all communities have suffered at one time or another, in one way or another. Our pain can separate and inflame us, if we let it. Instead, we choose to have our shared suffering bind us together, to forge a deeper and more spiritual society.

We are Faced with Numerous Challenges.

We are determined to overcome these challenges. Our common challenges, and our common determination unite us.

Our Pledge:

We pledge ourselves to create and uphold this Vision Declaration, to create a decent society for ourselves and a sustainable world for all of our children. We call upon the Divine powers and our own highest nature to achieve this worthy goal.

VISION DECLARATION

CONDITIONS AND EXPERIENCES:

CONDITION 01: BASIC NEEDS UNMET:

In our lives, we are not able to adequately satisfy our basic human needs for food, water, environment, health, education and housing, as well as our spiritual and cultural needs. These unmet needs create widespread problems, including:

- Poverty, malnutrition, physical and mental health problems, illiteracy.
- Social tensions, social hatred, ethnic and religious conflicts.
- Cultural degeneration, moral degeneration, anti social behavior such as prostitution, drug abuse, and stealing.
- Environmental destruction.
- Direct violence at various levels such as the rape of women, the abuse of children, blood-letting conflicts, armed upheavals and war.

CONDITION 02: THE CEASEFIRE HELPED, BUT FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IS NECESSARY:

The peace process reduced stress and made the people more relaxed and harmonious. Even though the Cease Fire Agreement contained flaws and weaknesses, it still brought substantial improvement to the lives of the people.

Although we began to experience some improvements in our lives thanks to the ceasefire and the peace process, general well-being of the civic life has not happened. The essential changes in people's vision, perspectives and attitudes have not taken place.

CONDITION 03: THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

It is important to address the crisis from the people's point of view, not limiting the solutions to the present focus on the relationship between GOSL and LTTE, or taking it as a problem in ethnic relationships only, but to look at all the problems in the present system of governance. Even if the war did not exist, there would still be many serious problems that would call for us to change our system of governance. We are doing this to end the conflict . but we are also doing this for a better life for ourselves and all people who live on this island.

Analysis of the Problem:

ANALYSIS 01: Violence Is Not A Part of Human Nature:

Human beings are not violent by nature. We strongly believe that human nature does not provide any basis for humans to be necessarily violent. Violence is a direct result of unjust social, economic and political structures in the society, not human nature.

ANALYSIS 02: The Roles of Violence and Power in Society:

We are concerned about the widespread violence top to bottom and across the society. Violence is both between ethnic and religious groups and within them. In the present context, we observe that violence mostly is inflicted by the powerful on the powerless, with the aim to gain or keep power. On all sides, the powerful punish innocent civilians to achieve their own aims for more power.

In the face of injustice, lawlessness, insecurity and demoralization, powerless groups also can turn towards violence – mostly as a blind reaction to a hopeless situation.

We also observe that noble human beings who are concerned about the life of the people, who work to eliminate violence from the society at times, become victims of violence.

We see political as well as socio-economic and cultural reasons behind the violence. But we emphasize the fact that it is not differences among people (in religion, ethnicity, generations, gender, region or other) that cause violence. Inequality in power is the core reason for violence.

ANALYSIS 03: The Present Political System Divides the People:

The present system of politics has no means and ways to bring together the creative energy of the people to resolve the underlying problems. Rather, it has been working continuously and efficiently to divide and segregate people into narrow ideologies and partisan groupings.

ANALYSIS 04: The Leaders Do Not Represent the People:

Under the current system, our only option is to tally depend on our political leaders and elected representatives to resolve our problems and to meet our basic needs and rights. But, our so-called representatives do not represent us, the common people. Our experience is that once they come to power they forget us, they do not listen to us and they do not represent us.

Politics has been thoroughly commercialized and miniaturized; it has ceased to be a field of public service. For too long we have set our hopes on politicians but again and again we have been disappointed. Today, politics does not attract genuine people's leaders, but a type of person who is ready to use corrupt and unlawful means and even violence to gain power for their own selfish ends.

Under the current system, we, the citizens of this country, are not participants in the governing processes of society and life. Decision-making in all major areas is a top-

down process. What is expected from us is to loudly approve and silently follow. We feel helpless in the face of this prevailing undemocratic governing system. We feel utterly irrelevant to the power structures, as we do not have any direct or indirect channels to participate in the decision-making processes in the country from community level up to national level.

ANALYSIS 05: The System is not useful to the People:

There is no mechanism to bring forward our aspirations, ideas and knowledge into the policy processes. On the other hand, stakes subvert the accepted policy frames and legal structures, nullifying any positive aspects of these and re-instating them on unethical foundations.

National economic policies do not address the needs of the people. Instead, they cater to external forces such as transnational companies and international monetary institutions. Economic decision-making is thus a top-down process with the people at the bottom having no role to play.

ANALYSIS 06: We Do Not Trust the Media [Media Is Part of the Problem]

The media (including newspapers, radio and television) is not fair, objective or trustworthy. The news is slanted and distorted by ethnic and ideological considerations. The media feeds the fires of hatred and separation among the people. We cannot trust what we hear or read: Sri Lankans believe widely different interpretations of events, based on which version of the news a person reads. Therefore, the media plays a major role in making the separations among the people worse.

ANALYSIS 07: Our Society Has Degenerated:

The moral values of the society, the cultural heritage of the people and the ethical foundations of the professions are losing their former meaning. Human relations are suffering and people are becoming alienated from each other, unable to see and meet each other as fellow human beings.

1. The social, cultural and spiritual institutions (school, temple etc.) of the country are being weakened and degenerated and the spiritual and mental well-being of the people is thus being eroded.
2. There is a problem of increasing abuse of drugs and alcohol among the youth and their physical and mental health is being destroyed.
3. The above-mentioned problems are severely affecting foremost women and children and creating an insecure and demoralized situation as regards to their future.

Due to all these negative factors and life situations, people are getting demoralized and their life energies are being drained. The physical and mental health of the people at large is consequently deteriorating in an alarming scale.

THEREFORE: Fundamental Change is needed:

We strongly feel that to effectively address these problems and make representative democracy more meaningful, a major change has to take place in the governance systems. People must become true participants in political processes.

It is not enough to change governments. We have to change society and the system of governance itself. Our vision is to create a society where religious, ethnic and cultural groups respect each other, where people can closely participate in the decision-making processes, where economic and development programs are people-centered and where people uphold environmentally friendly lifestyles.

OUR VISION OF SOCIETY:

"FIRST, WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS. LET US START WITH THAT."

If we start from our ethnic or religious perspectives, we can never achieve a harmonious society. If we start from the one thing we hold in common -- our humanity -- we can envision a whole and harmonious society.

We all want the same things for her children. Let us start with that. We want a decent, violence free life for our children. We want all children to have a decent future.

We all want to believe that our lives matter. We all want to feel that we are valued, honored and supported by society. We all want to believe that our government is fair, just and under our control.

VISION 01: We Must Heal Our Society and Ourselves:

We will never achieve sustainable peace in the country unless we, the people, first develop peace within ourselves, in our families and communities. We need to commit ourselves, personally and collectively, to build this peace. We must begin by promoting love, friendship and cooperation within ourselves, our families, our communities and the society at large. This is the only way to create a new society based on nonviolence and justice.

Our vision is of a society based on life-centered values – compassion, caring, nurturing, and sharing.

As a people, our goal is to heal ourselves and our society, while ensuring a sustainable and humane future for our children. We aspire to satisfy our basic needs while guaranteeing a decent livelihood and a space for developing creativity for our children in the future.

VISION 02: The Harmony of the People is Paramount:

We believe that all difficulties would be manageable and resolvable if preparations are made and precautions are taken to ensure that nothing disturbs the racial/ethnic harmony or upsets the respect for law and order. We must reaffirm our determination not to allow any citizen or any community to be persecuted or marginalized because of race, religion, language, or culture.

We must have a broad people's dialogue covering the main issues of social divisions, political structures, economic strategies and our lifestyles.

VISION 03: Eliminating the Root of Violence:

Violence can be eliminated only by creating a social, political and cultural environment in which each and every person can live with human dignity and respect for each other's differences.

VISION 04: Tolerance and Respect:

We must guarantee that all religions and ethnic groups are equally respected and enjoy freedom and fairness.

Religious and ethnic leaders must work to reach consensus on how to promote tolerance and respect for each other's identities. A national dialogue is necessary, with the aim to reach a national consensus how to promote tolerance and respect for each other identities.

Places of religious worship, schools and universities must be transformed into centers that promote and cultivate the consciousness of peace. State institutions and other social institutions must adopt policies and work ethics with an aim to promote respect among religions, ethnicities and cultures.

VISION 05: Power

All people in all communities need and deserve the power to determine their own lives and well-being. Without basic empowerment, conflicts are inevitable.

However, "devolution of power" must mean more than a Sinhalese elite handing over some authority to a Tamil and/or Muslim elite, with the people on all sides remaining powerless.

True devolution of power means that people in villages, divisions, districts and provinces will make the most fundamental decisions about their lives and their future. In this way, no group will be subject to the arbitrary and oppressive decisions of elites who are separated from the people's point of view and the people's reality.

VISION 06: Basic Needs:

National policies and Constitutional guarantees regarding distribution of resources and services should adhere to the principle of satisfying the basic human needs of all citizens and all communities.

VISION 07: Language:

Language should not be a barrier between people. A language policy must be created and followed that recognizes the two national languages as equals. All measures (legal and institutional) should be taken so that Tamil is given its due place as an official language of the country.

We appeal to our writers, intellectuals, politicians and media personnel to avoid using ideologically biased language that might create divisions and hatred among ethnic or religious groups.

The language policy also should include the principle of learning each other's language in the school system. This policy has to be implemented with commitment and efficiency.

VISION 08: Media

The media should be reorganized on the principles of Public Service Broadcasting and detached from party politics and commercial interests. This will promote fair and free media.

News media should develop a culture of professionalism, objectivity and strict adherence to a standard of ethics. A clear line should be drawn between reporting the news and editorial comments. The media should not be used to inflame, incite or otherwise encourage separation among the people.

OUR VISION OF GOVERNANCE:

VISION 01: We Need New Forms of Governance:

It is time that we create a democratic and participatory mode of governance that goes far beyond conventional representative democracy. On this basis, we will be able to improve the quality of governance. This will enable us to name and elect genuine organic representatives of the people to higher offices.

The task of government is to govern firmly and wisely in the interests of all the people. All of humanity is involved, affected, and conditioned by politics. Thus, instruments of people's participatory democracy, combined with a healthy form of representation, should be incorporated into the system of governance.

We propose a complete restructuring of the political institutions of the country on the principles of devolution of power and decentralization. Our goal must be to empower all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka as equal partners in the affairs of the Sri Lankan state.

VISION 02: The Leadership of the People:

Politics should be an area for public service and not a commercial industry. We must work to free our political culture from corruption, dishonesty, deception, hatred and violence and to place it on a firm moral foundation.

To make sure that our politicians function as true representatives of the people, we need to bring forward our own community leaders:

- Who are ready to listen to us,
- Who understand and respect our rights, aspirations and needs,
- Who have a fair knowledge about our society, environment and heritage,
- Who have the qualities of personal integrity, leadership skills and nonviolence.

VISION 03: Human Rights and Human Responsibilities

It is imperative to make constitutional guarantees to ensure human rights of every citizen living in any part of the country.

We believe that all Sri Lankans must have the exact same rights and the exact same responsibilities, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, caste, class, sex or region. We believe that a universal set of human rights must include, as a minimum:

1. Guarantee safety of all citizens everywhere (freedom from fear).
2. Guarantee freedom from summary execution, torture, terror and humiliation.
3. Guarantee free movement of all people everywhere (the right to travel).
4. Guarantee freedom of ideas, information and political expression (democracy).
5. Guarantee **each individual** freedom of religious and spiritual expression.
6. Guarantee freedom and equality of culture, language and creative expression.
7. Guarantee respect for the persons and property of all citizens.
8. Guaranteeing non-interference with work and the opportunity for right livelihood.
9. Guarantee democratic and nonviolent participation in governance.
10. Guarantee the right of self-determination of every individual and village community.

These rights and responsibilities must be more than just words on paper. It is the responsibility of every citizen to insure these rights for all citizens. And, it is the responsibility of government to promptly and fairly investigate all abuses of these fundamental human rights, and to prosecute the abusers, regardless of their rank and privilege.

VISION 04: Consensual Politics:

We must strive to promote and uphold a culture of consensual, people-led politics, as opposed to divisive and partisan politics. We must ensure our own active grassroots participation in the reconciliation, healing and rebuilding process.

Effective methods and mechanisms of checks and balances must be established to ensure transparency in political and state institutions.

Our politics must be based on mutual trust and respect. Our governance structures must be based on the simple premise that we all want the same things for children. From the basis of mutual trust and respect, all of the differences within the society can be resolved.

It is important that we develop an education and training process so that every citizen and institution will respect the civil and political rights of all fellow citizens and social and cultural groups. We must create a conducive space so that all people, including women, take an active part in the process.

In the last analysis, we, the people, are the most decisive factor in the peace process. We have to be open minded and tolerant. We must strive to build the foundation for peace at the grass-roots level and among all peoples.