



Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere  
(ECPAT Sri Lanka)



# **Celebrating 25 Years of Service and the Universal Children's Day**

**THE WORLD WE WANT**  
**THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHILD**

**Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall  
Colombo**

**November 20, 2016**

## Report on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, PEaCE celebrated 25 years of service to the communities in Sri Lanka at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH). The event coincided with Universal Children's Day, providing PEaCE the opportunity to celebrate this milestone. The Chief Guest for the event was the former Head of State Madam Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Guest of Honour was Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Minister of Special Assignments, representing His Excellency President Maithripala Sirisena. The event was also graced by the Executive Director, ECPAT International Mrs. Dorothy Rozga and Dr. Masako Matsuyama representing White Bird, Japan, a donor of PEaCE. The event was attended by over two hundred and fifty participants comprising of government and non-government sector officials in the child protection field, civil society organization representatives, and child rights activists. Prominent among the participants were child right's activists and advocates that have worked with PEaCE during its 25 years long campaign. PEaCE also invited children from District Children's Clubs and children that engage in PEaCE educational programs to participate in the event as we believe that by witnessing the handover of the Children's Declaration they are empowered to understand and stand up for their rights and protection and further be inspired by the work done by child rights activists to strengthen children's lives.



In the months leading up to the day, PEaCE launched a campaign, bringing all child protection stakeholders from all levels to participate programs undertaken. The campaign titled 'THE WORLD WE WANT – Through the Eyes of the Child' was initiated in collaboration with LEMONAID+CharITea and Terre des Hommes joined later. The focus of the campaign was to raise awareness on the sexual exploitation of children.

The campaign was structured to ensure that all participatory stakeholders understood the critical nature of commercial sexual exploitation of children and are ensured to take necessary steps to prevent children from harm. The campaign bought in ideas from the grassroots level with PEaCE consulting children and child protection stakeholders from all twenty five districts. PEaCE

conducted extensive workshops to generate awareness on the rights of children and child protection mechanisms. The event comprised of four main segments; Handing over the Children's Declaration, launching of a simplified law book, relaunching the Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism and the presentation of the Outstanding Personality Award for a Child Right's Activist.

Workshops were conducted for District Children's Councils from nine provinces with children representatives from 25 districts partaking in contributing their ideas to develop the 'The World We Want- through the eyes of the Child' declaration. The declaration was developed in two levels. Initially the district level children's councils formulated the ideas and developed the first draft. This was discussed, edited and sharpened at the national level children's council and the declaration



was finalized with the hopes of sparking change across the nation. With the approval of The Department of Probation and Childcare Services, PEaCE was able to communicate with children's councils at a district level and facilitated to develop this resolution titled 'The World We Want- Through the Eyes of the Child' which has all the requests of how children would like to view this world.



The declaration touched an array of issues that needed to be addressed. The issues addressed covered and catered specifically to alleviating the standard and status of children. It included strengthening the children's societies and obtaining social recognition, issues of child marriage, child labour and gender equality. Further, it was dedicated to diversifying the curriculum at school to include and cater to every child despite what language they speak or their mental capacity. The declaration also touched upon the use and selling of drugs and liquor. An important highlight of the declaration would be strengthening of the judicial system for children's rights to be upheld and justice served equally and fairly among those affected. The declaration was developed in three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. The declaration was handed over to the state leader's representative and the former Head of State for action and practical implementation of the world children of Sri Lanka want. (Please see Annexure for detail)

Simultaneously, PEaCE conducted awareness raising sessions at the Good Market Colombo during the weekend for the duration of the campaign. The Good Market is a social event that caters to the upper middle and upper class of society. The PEaCE team organized a booth at the event and sought to raise awareness on the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children. During these sessions, PEaCE conducted an informal survey on the knowledge of the society of the persistence of such issues. Close to 70% stated that they were unaware of such an issue being present in society.



Following the handover of the declaration, the organization compiled and launched a book that contains all the existing legislation in Sri Lanka pertaining to children and that it can be used by law enforcement officials to conduct their duties in protecting children. As the laws governing children’s protection are extensive and law enforcement officials are at times in quandary on how to proceed in certain situations, PEaCE took the necessary steps to simplify child related legislations for the reference of officers and other individuals working with children alike.



Furthermore, the organization relaunched 'Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism ' which highlights on the severity of the issues of the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the travel and tourism industry. The vulnerability of children being exploited has increased dramatically in the past 20 years as travel and tourism saw an increase. Despite the precise scope of the issue being unknown, with indicators showing a dramatic increase in crime and persistence, regulation and social protection

are lagging far behind fast-changing phenomena, such as online booking sites, peer-to-peer services, volun-tourism, orphanage tourism, slum tourism and eco-stays. The unregulated development of travel and tourism disrupt local economies and make children more vulnerable to exploitation.

Following the book launch was the main event for the evening; the presentation of the Outstanding Personality Award for Child Rights Activist, in honour of the unsung heroes who work tirelessly towards the protection of the children of Sri Lanka. The award is to honour and recognize an inspiring activist who has made an exceptional contribution to establishing the rights of the child in Sri Lanka with compassion, dedication and courage. Calls for nominations were advertised in newspapers in three languages and an independent selection committee decided on the winner. The winner of the Outstanding Personality Award for Child Rights Activist: Mrs. Getsie Shanmugam.



Getsie Shanmugam’s contributions to improving the lives of children are remarkable not only for her efforts over several careers over nearly six decades, but also for the vital and path-breaking nature of her work with some of the most vulnerable groups of children in Sri Lanka. Getsie has continued to drive many vital initiatives for children, including establishment of an early safe house for child victims in the justice system, community and education-sector services for children and families following the tsunami, and also conducting sensitive research on prevalence of child



sexual abuse, rehabilitation of child soldiers and care of migrants’ children. She has continued to be active in working in former conflict areas and the plantation sector, guiding and training others – and routinely being called on to deal with ‘difficult’ cases, both in the field and at home. Getsie continues to contribute to state and private radio and television programs to provide advice to parents and

caregivers on supporting children.

PEaCE has been maintaining strong relationships with key child protection stakeholders, individuals and organizations, for the past 25 years. The organization commemorated this milestone in the presence of important dignitaries and individuals that have rendered their support to the PEaCE mission over the years. Further, PEaCE invited organizations and individuals that are prominent in the child protection field that we have not engaged with previously with the aim

of building new relationships and strengthening PEaCE presence at the national and community level. Children and parents from our project areas too were present.

Dr Sarath Amunugama who represented the President, stated in his speech *“These people who are exploited really are seen as the victims and not as the people who are on the wrong side of the road. You have done very well, because*

*while we are pursuing growth you have looked after those who have been badly affected by some of those activities. For your advocacy, for your interest to change the rules and regulations of the game so that poor and the dispossessed will be heard, in that you have done an extremely important service to the country. His Excellency President has set up a task force to report on the rights of children. I will convey the wishes of many of you here that this organization should also be represented on the taskforce”.*



Madam Chandrika Kumaratunga, the chief guest said *“This was one of the subjects that I took to heart when I assumed office as President. We started work with the taskforce with regard to the protection of the child. Then, the National Child Protection Authority functioned effectively with highly professional people on the board. We were able to increase the number of cases that were reported of child abuse. Until then people were hesitant to report. We were able to change this by creating specially trained units in every police station in the country to take care of child abuse with mainly women police officers to deal with complaints and take practical action. The number of cases that were solved and dealt with legally increased during that ten year period. What we have to be aware of especially with the increasing tourism industry since the end of the war are the possibilities and the dangers of children being used and abused in the sex trade being great. Child prostitution is on the increase I am told. It is a very serious issue which has to be dealt with. For all this, we have to create awareness. I noted that in a survey PEaCE had undertaken that about 84% of the general public is unaware of even the existence of such an issue as this is not often talked about. People are often shy to talk about children being abused. Therefore, I would say that we have to start with intense campaigns to create awareness about the dangers and horrors of child abuse. Not just sexual abuse, but also violence against the child. Programmes by government and by NGOs and CSOs and religious leaders will have to be launched intensively and extensively.”*

The executive Director of ECPAT International highlighted in her address, the important milestones of the campaign as follows *“In the course of the journey that began in Chiang Mai, ECPAT – and its members including PEaCE - played a leadership role in organising three World Congresses to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It convened numerous advocacy meetings with Human Rights mechanisms, United Nations officials, and world leaders. And it undertook a wide range of awareness raising events, including placing a petition with more than 7 million signatures in the hands of the Human Right Council. As a network, ECPAT’s members relentlessly fought and continue to fight to keep the sexual exploitation of children on global, regional, national and local agendas.”*



She further stated *“For the last quarter century, PEaCE has worked tirelessly and bravely to combat the sexual exploitation of Sri Lanka’s children in all its forms. It has defended child victims, has been instrumental in arrests of transnational child sex offenders, undertaken ground-breaking research, raised awareness from the grassroots to the national level, and advocated with top level decision makers for critical policy and legal changes to protect children”.*

*“Looking back at the history of PEaCE, I am confident that it will continue to play a leadership role in preventing the sexual exploitation of the country’s children; in ensuring that those who fall victims receive the care, services, access to justice and love they deserve and in ensuring that the country achieves its 2030 commitment (Sustainable Development Goals - targets 5.2 and 16.2). PEaCE has the vision, the experiences, the technical know-how, the commitment, and above all courage to do this”.*

### **History of PEaCE**

Launched in 1991 as a campaign, Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere (PEaCE) was established to support the global initiative of ECPAT International. ECPAT is an international network of organizations and individuals working together to eliminate child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. In 1990, researchers at an Ecumenical Consultation on Third World tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand, revealed the extent to which tourism-linked child prostitution was prevalent and thriving in certain Asian countries. The consultation ended with a commitment to take action on ending the commercial aspect of child sexual exploitation within a time frame of three years. PEaCE started the long road to ending the sexual exploitation of children in 1990 but officially established the organization in 1991. PEaCE aims to foster collaborations among local civil society organizations and activists to broaden the spectrum of the child rights community to form a network for the protection of children from sexual exploitation.

As a registered non-governmental organization under the Voluntary Social Services Organizations in Sri Lanka, the main focus of PEaCE is the preventative aspects of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). In exploring this aspect, PEaCE targets aid to children and youth from the most vulnerable geographical areas in Sri Lanka. In collaboration with local groups and activists in these areas, PEaCE has been raising awareness, counselling mothers, monitoring the movements of child sex tourists, helping victims in court and assisting youth to engage in employment among other activities. PEaCE, since its inception, has been operational with the support of its donors. The vision and mission of PEaCE has been constant

throughout its existence. We strive to cultivate a society that protects and promotes the rights of every child and creates an environment in which the safety and security of every child is assured. PEaCE actively contributes, primarily to the elimination of CSEC and strives to promote the protection of children from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Our vision and mission was held determinedly throughout the 25 years of campaign. PEaCE was able to conduct extensive research to combat CSEC. In 2006, UNICEF and International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that 40,000 children have fallen prey to child prostitution in Sri Lanka.

The full extent of Child Sex Tourism in Sri Lanka have been difficult to document given the covert nature in which it operates on the fringes of society. The cases that are reported make only for an insignificant portion of the actual statistics procured by our local authorities. Cases have been increasing and the justice system is not adept to handle the volume with only 30 percent of the cases actually going in to courts.

The journey of PEaCE began at a time when people did not want to openly address issues about sexual abuse as it was considered a taboo. It was considered against Sri Lankan cultural norms and religious practices to discuss the subject overtly.

The tourism industry and hotels were not in favour of the PEaCE campaign as it would cause severe setback to their businesses. Further, with the 1983 Black July, the industry that was negatively affected was just starting to become strong again and it was speculated that the PEaCE campaign would hamper business opportunities brought forward by large groups of travellers. Child sex tourists and local pimps travelled together in organized groups and issued threats to PEaCE members. The public were reluctant to attend awareness programs, as the subject was considered dirty and indecent to be spoken of.

PEaCE took up these challenges and handpicked organizations, working in areas where tourism had been expropriated by individuals. Intensive awareness and consultations enabled PEaCE to comprehend the real situation underlying tourism. With the help of these organizations, PEaCE was able to reach communities, religious bodies, law enforcement agencies, civil society organisations, guest house keepers and other concerned citizens.

Despite initially opposing the campaign, the Sri Lanka Tourist Board finally understood the grave crime committed against children and began to recognize the work of PEaCE. This understanding led to PEaCE becoming a member of the steering committee of the two -year action plan on "zero tolerance for child sex tourism in Sri Lanka" launched by the Sri Lanka Tourist Board. The National Tourist Guide Lecturers' Association of Sri Lanka joined hands with PEaCE to change the landscape of tourism in Sri Lanka.

In the journey following its silver jubilee, PEaCE strives to continue working with children, parents, communities and all child protection stakeholders to successfully combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and to protect children and uphold their rights.