

# Is Racial Equality a Human Right for Sri Lankans?

by Gajalakshmi Paramasivam

(November 02, 2012, Melbourne, Sri Lanka Guardian) I read through the presentation by Sri Lanka's Minister the Hon Mahinda Samarasinghe's presentation to the UNHRC – as published by Sri Lanka Guardian.



Photo credit: Indi Samarajiva

It was not difficult to follow and initially it did make sense. It made sense because I read it with an open mind. But when it came to the part about May 2009 – I started rejecting the statements being made by the Minister. The Minister said 'A sea-change occurred approximately 12 months after the 2008 UPR with the rescue of nearly 300,000 civilians in the month of May 2009.'

This to me was like the quota system at University entrance level which became a strong reason for the war. This statement alone confirms that little has been done to bridge the ethnic divide at the grassroots level.

This week's Human Values lesson for our folks in Northern Sri Lanka, included the following passage:

*There are three ways in which we make decisions:*

*(1) Through our direct physical observation using our physical senses*

(2) *Through Discriminative thinking*

(3) *Through Belief*

*Observations through senses would give us the right answer for that place at that time – provided we take a 360 degree view i.e. - from all sides. The net value of all observers is the right answer for that time and place. This answer however would not work at a different time and/or at a different place.*

*Rights and wrongs as per Common Principles, Common Law and Common Processes would provide the right solution to all who practice those principles, laws and processes. This is the basic reason for education. It helps expand our world and others' energies work for us through the practice of common principles.*

*Belief is our personal Truth. Decisions made on the basis of Belief would always work for within that pool of common belief. They do not need explaining. If explained they would be right. This is because Truth is Universal. An individual deciding as per her/his observation only, on the basis of her/his belief would find that that decision works for her/him and all those who believe in that person. It would be wrong to impose those decisions on others – those who do not have faith. If enforced on those who do not have faith – it would lead to wrong outcomes. If Seniors include Juniors within themselves the decisions would be intuitively shared. That is the power of Belief.*

The following presentation by the Sri Lankan Minister, seemed largely to be under category (1) above but without any contribution of observed facts from the 'other' side: *'Sri Lanka, like any post-conflict polity, faced challenges of a magnitude and scope that were truly daunting. The housing and maintenance of hundreds of thousands of civilians, restoring security, law and order, clearing of vast tracts of land contaminated by UXO including IEDs and landmines, restoring physical, administrative, economic and social infrastructure, preparing people for resettlement, identifying ex-combatants for rehabilitative care, the transition from humanitarian assistance to a development phase, all while maintaining a stable economy and sustainable growth in the rest of the country, were just some of the tasks that the Government had to contend with. At the same time, we were not complacent but tried our utmost to prevent and forestall acts of destabilization from within and outside the country. There are still some elements that support the LTTE's cause of dismemberment and separation of our island nation. We are aware of these initiatives and will defeat them by our ongoing strategy of re-democratization, reconciliation, reconstruction and development.'*

Except for the Trilingual Policy, the points highlighted under implementation of National Action Plan do not include Common Principles based approach to the ethnic problem – due to which this UPR has become an important assessment at global level. This confirms lack of wisdom in and / or commitment on the part of the Government to multicultural issues.

Given that the proportion of Sri Lankans using discriminative thinking on the basis of substance which leads to production of objectively measurable outcomes, is declining, Belief seems to be the more reliable basis on which effective solutions could be found for Sri Lankans. In this regard, Belief based statements by leaders of minorities in Sri Lanka ought to have formed part of the presentation to the UPR Committee. The decisions presented at best are based on the belief of Sinhalese leaders and hence would not work for Tamils, other minorities and most importantly for Sri Lankans who are **believed** to be Sri Lankans by fellow Sri Lankans. Such a leader would have included the solutions by all ethnicities – to Racial Equality.

If Racial Equality is considered a Human Right in Sri Lanka, that ought to have been the highlight of this Presentation. Without this assurance – the Presentation qualifies merely to be related to other presentations during this session – towards best-looking award.