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Written statement* submitted by African Green Foundation International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



In undertaking a relatively effective rehabilitation program for former LTTE combatants, Sri Lanka has fulfilled a recommendation made in the country's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report

Restorative justice for former LTTE combatants involved the rehabilitation, reinsertion, and reintegration of 11,481 former LTTE combatants, including 594 child soldiers (as of January 2013). This figure includes 10,329 of the approximately 12,000 LTTE members who surrendered or were detained at the end of the conflict, and were rehabilitated and reintegrated into society by October 20 11. These rehabilitees were reintegrated into the community within the two-year stipulated period, while child beneficiaries completed their rehabilitation and reintegration within one year. The Presidential Amnesty issued in support of restorative justice for LTTE members at the end of the conflict, an act which directly promotes reconciliation, stands in opposition to retributive justice which seeks to punish individuals for their wrongdoings through the judicial and prison systems. Despite Sri Lanka being a nation which suffered severe damage to its social, political, and economic development due to the LTTE's decades-long insurgency, Sri Lankans were able to identify many members of the LTTE as victims of radicalisation.

Sri Lankan society has always known about the LTTE leadership's long-established and calculated strategy of indoctrinating a violent separatist ideology into Tamil people. It was also well-known that the LTTE propagated what many considered disinformation among the Tamil community in the North and East of Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora living abroad. Sri Lankans were also familiar with the LTTE's ruthless tactic of abducting school children for recruitment as child soldiers. Restorative justice is not new to the country; it is very much a part of the Sri Lankan spiritual heritage of forgiveness, which understands that social development involves the transformation of individuals, not their prolonged imprisonment or death. It should be noted that, unlike in Sri Lanka, in some countries, such as Jordan and Yemen, the lack of sustained political will and popular support undermined the sustainability of similar rehabilitation (de-radicalisation) programs.

The program "Way-Forward on Rehabilitation, Reinsertion, and Reintegration" (W-RRR) of Sri Lanka's Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) was designed in compliance with international principles, guidelines, and best practices, as well as with due consideration to the unique requirements emerging from the context of the Sri Lankan conflict. Approximately USD 9,136,370 was spent by the Sri Lankan government for the rehabilitation of former LTTE combatants between January 2009 and September 2012. This sum does not include the (initial) smaller contributions in funds and other resources made by the United Nations International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, international NGOs, several Western and other governments, local NGOs, and Sri Lankan private sector organisations.

Several United Nations and humanitarian agencies, notably the IOM and HALO Trust, assisted the Sri Lankan government in the rehabilitation of former combatants through a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program (DDG) in 2009, as well as in the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The IOM, trusted by the Sri Lankan government, had access to IDP welfare and rehabilitation centres throughout the combatant rehabilitation process.

The components of the Sri Lankan "6+1 Model" rehabilitation program included: (1) Educational Rehabilitation, (2) Vocational Rehabilitation, (3) Psychosocial and Creative Therapies for Rehabilitation, (4) Social, Cultural, and Family Rehabilitation, (5) Spiritual and Religious Rehabilitation, (6) Recreational Rehabilitation, and (+) Community Engagement.

The Educational Rehabilitation included providing formal education to beneficiaries under 18 years of age within a residential school environment for the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Ordinary and Advanced Level Examinations, as only 60% of the beneficiaries under 18 had studied up to the national standard of Ordinary Level (Grade 10).

Vocational Rehabilitation included skills development for Agriculture, Carpentry, Masonry, Motor Mechanics, Beauty Culture, Garment and Textiles, Information Technology, and other industries for which there is a (labour) market demand.

A major component of the Psycho-social and Creative Rehabilitation program was the in-house counselling provided to beneficiaries. The Centre staff was trained in psychological counselling and advanced psycho-social skills by a clinical psychologist, a counselling psychologist, counsellors, therapists, and other professionals in psychology.

Social, Cultural, and Family Rehabilitation included social and educational tours to different parts of Sri Lanka to gain an understanding of the diversity within the island. These included visits to universities, schools, and other developments in Colombo, the ethnically diverse commercial capital of Sri Lanka.

Family Rehabilitation consisted of visits by family or next of kin in a friendly atmosphere conducive to rehabilitation, writing and receiving of letters, and visits to home villages in the event of a celebration, illness, or a death in the family.

The Spiritual and Religious Rehabilitation was seen to have a strong impact in helping beneficiaries to emotionally and morally reconcile with their past and develop a state of inner peace, so that they are psychologically in a position to look to the future.

Recreational Rehabilitation included beneficiary participation in team sports such as cricket, volleyball, and traditional team sports. Recreational Rehabilitation also included engaging in other forms of physical exercise for an allocated period of time each day.

The rehabilitated former LTTE combatants were “reinserted” (resettled) in their original homes with a three-month reinsertion assistance package that was meant to meet their preliminary basic needs in terms of shelter, food, clothing, and healthcare. This process sought to rely on community-based support structures. The final phase of the W-RRR program, the reintegration of former combatants into their home communities, constituted the two aspects of social integration and economic integration. The (+1) Community Engagement component of the rehabilitation program helped to work towards social integration.

Economic reintegration was to be achieved by providing employment or support for self-employment through the aftercare system, and by ensuring employability of rehabilitees through catch-up programs in education and vocational training as described above.

Rehabilitation programs for child combatants

The rehabilitation programs for child beneficiaries involved additional facets such as an emphasis on further education and the inclusion of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides programs. Approximately 40% of child beneficiaries had not studied up to the national standard of the Ordinary Level Examination (Grade 10); many were in fact illiterate. All child beneficiaries were admitted into a prominent school near Colombo (Ratmalana Hindu College), with the exception of those who preferred to undertake vocational training.

Some beneficiaries were able to enrol in university education, and several also entered the very competitive medical schools in national universities.[118] The rehabilitation program conducted for 273 former LTTE child combatants at the premises of the Ratmalana Hindu College, in partnership with community organisations and private individuals, was found to be particularly effective due to its special English Language program and Girl Guides and Boy Scouts programs. English was taught using the comprehensive Montessori Method which embraces different learning styles and student-centred learning through non-traditional, non-competitive, and collaborative teaching methods.

Demonstrating effectiveness of cognitive transformation

The effectiveness of the deradicalisation of the Sri Lankan rehabilitation program was assessed using: (1) interviews with beneficiaries, (2) review of past records, (3) observations noted by staff, and (4) formal assessment in the form of psychometric testing.

An independent assessment of the effectiveness of the rehabilitation program was conducted by leading psychologists in the field, Arie W. Kruglanski and Michele J. Gelfand of the University of Maryland (USA), which included a baseline survey to assess the changing attitudes and opinions of the beneficiaries.

Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program which has cost less than USD 20 million, stands in contrast with others such as in Afghanistan with a budget of over USD 220 million, with a much less effective outcome (although the nature of Afghanistan's on-going conflict presents much greater challenges to reintegration). It also shows that a program supported by vast funds such as in Saudi Arabia may not be required for the cognitive transformation of beneficiaries.

In undertaking a relatively effective rehabilitation program for former LTTE combatants, Sri Lanka has fulfilled a recommendation made in the country's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report produced in November 2011. However, it can be noted that although there have been no incidents of recidivism or terrorism related crime since the reintegration of rehabilitated combatants, Sri Lanka's robust security platform which continued post-conflict is likely also to be a strong factor for this post-conflict stability.

Global Srilankan forum excom- GSLF UK, GSLF Australia, GSLF Poland, GSLF UAE, GSLF Ireland, GSLF Canada, GSLF Switzerland, GSLF Russia. NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.