

Policy Recommendations - Sri Lanka



Violent Extremism (VE) threatens the security and fundamental rights of peaceful living. Youth are essential actors in contributing to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and peacebuilding work. Youth are not only highly affected by VE, but they also play an important role as positive change agents. The way youth resilience manifests is very much dependent on social, political, and economic factors. ALLY intends to amplify young people's constructive voices and agency in addressing diverse factors of violent extremist narratives in South Asia. The recommendations herein were produced by the ALLY youth researchers through an eight months long participatory research with multiple stakeholders, and with further contributions from ALLY staff and fellows.

The following recommendations for the government of Sri Lanka would, if implemented, facilitate the increased engagement and impact of youth in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism in Sri Lanka:

Resume Transitional Justice Processes and Relevant Government Institutions

YPBs emphasized resuming the transitional justice process in Sri Lanka. They recommend that the Office of the Missing Persons, the Office of Reparations, the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation, Truth and Reconciliation Committees, the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms, and the Ministry of National Integration would be re-opened, strengthened, and empowered by the government to fulfill their various objectives.

Establish National Action Plan for PVE

Formulate a comprehensive national roadmap towards preventing violent extremism that includes youth based on the 2015 plan of action to PVE of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Creating International and National Fellowships and Training Programs for YPBs

Fellowship opportunities have been identified as an effective way to support youth collaboration and capacity building. YPBs emphasized the need for long-term programs in order to include youth from both rural and urban areas to implement PVE programs. Such programs could be funded by the national government and managed by INGOs and local CSOs.

Non-discriminatory Policies

YPBs recommend the government reform policies and legislation that are discriminatory against minorities. Policies and legislations must treat everyone equally in order to ensure fair service delivery and equal treatment by law enforcement.

Enhance Youth Engagement in PVE

The establishment of a National Peace Institute dedicated to peace and reconciliation regarding policy and pragmatic level is recommended. Such an Institute should engage YPBs to contribute and participate. A national mandate for youth inclusion in PVE policies was also emphasized by the YPBs. Youth voices should be considered in all matters via youth consultations.

Facilitating Nation-wide Funding for Youth-Led PVE Initiatives

YPBs emphasized that most funding is only available to urban-centric youth-led initiatives. YPBs from rural areas require more support for PVE efforts. More funding and support should be made available to YPBs in rural areas.



Institutionalize Youth Participation

Youth-led peacebuilding and PVE efforts cannot be considered in isolation from other ways in which youth engage with the government. Ensure youth inclusion in political decision-making processes (e.g. through youth councils, etc.) at local and national levels in order to establish a collaborative environment between youth and government.

National Peace Studies Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Education

Though Sri Lanka already has peace education at the tertiary level, YPBs suggest adding peace studies and comparative religion as mandatory subjects to school curricula. This would help promote better understanding of community-level reconciliation in a post-conflict context.

Mixed Schools

Schools segregated by religion and ethnicity reproduce and perpetuate existing tensions among younger generations. YPBs proposed education sector reforms which prioritize mixed school systems as means to promote tolerance and co-existence with other religions and ethnicities.

Primary Enablers

- **International support and donors**
- **Academic institutions** and degree programs on peacebuilding (i.e., University of Kelaniya, University of Colombo, Kothalawala Defense University)
- **Government institutions which were active until 2019** (i.e., Office of National Unity and Reconciliation, Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms, Office of Missing Persons, Office of Reparations, Ministry of National Integration)
- **Government staff** such as National Integration Officers
- **Fellowship programs** such as KAICIID and SEA-AIR
- **Youth-led organizations** (i.e., Sri Lanka Unites, IYAP, Interfaith Colombo, Hashtag Generation)
- **INGO and NGO** projects
- **Youth-led district level centers** established by Sri Lanka Unites
- Opportunities for **volunteerism**
- **Self-motivation and determination**
- **Mentorship** from trained professional peacebuilders, senior civil society leaders, and academics
- **Peer-to-peer** support from other YPBs

Primary Barriers

- Lack of initiatives which reach **rural, grassroots communities**
- Lack of **integrated PVE efforts**: PVE is not linked with economic development, health, mental health and other sectors
- **Suspension** of former government institutions and activities for peacebuilding
- **Lack of PVE policies**, mandates and research
- Lack of **long-term, outcomes-driven programs** and funding for PVE
- **Public suspicion** of PVE and peacebuilding
- Lack of **media support and visibility** for PVE
- **Pressure from families and communities** against working with others of different religion and ethnicities
- Peacebuilding may be **misperceived** as self-interested and attention-seeking
- **Lack of opportunities** for youth in governance
- **Language barriers**, especially in rural areas
- **Surveillance** and intimidation by government agencies
- Low salary and career opportunities: peacebuilding as an unpaid volunteerism
- Gender based discrimination