

**News Release**  
**Nationwide Youth Parade for Reconciliation**

30<sup>th</sup> October 2015

AFRIEL (Association for Friendship and Love) is currently holding a nationwide youth parade for promoting reconciliation. All the parade team members are war-affected northern youth and they participated in this event on a voluntary basis. To enhance understanding between different war-affected communities about the post-war situation in each of their areas, this youth parade team has travelled across Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, and they will go to Kandy, Matale, Hambantota, Matara, Galle, Kalutara, Colombo, Gampaha, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura in the mid November, total 20 districts with nearly 75 areas. Similar issues shared by people in the north and south were addressed during the parade. The parade team further integrated opinions of the victim groups they met during the travel and invite them to participate in a forum this December in Jaffna, where a sustainable political solution from the victims' perspectives will be made to achieve a long-term peace in Sri Lanka.

The parade team performed street drama and music on the topics regarding national reconciliation. Each performance lasts around one hour, including 30 minutes street drama and a 30-minute social forum after the show. The street drama story is divided into four sections. The first section is about a group of villagers, who are suffering from many social problems happen to all races in the village where they are living, are trying to identify the crux of the problems. The second section highlights the current critical issues in the north, upcountry and east of Sri Lanka, followed by the third section which presents the audience how people become self-absorbed and not willing to listen to other people's difficulties, political interventions, and the variety of opinions held by people toward these issues. This situation leads to a society which misunderstanding and mutual distrust exists between ethnic groups and even among people of the same race. The last section of the story summarizes that there will be no social problems can be solved in a weak civil society with members don't consider themselves as parts of a community and being ignorant about the plight of other groups or individuals.

This peaceful and rational campaign, unfortunately, has been suffering from intense military and police intervention occurred during the northern campaign. In the past 3 weeks, the parade team members were questioned by the unknown people from military camp, police department and CID in Mullaitivu district Kepapalai and Tannimurippu. Kilinochchi district Skandapuram and Kilinochchi market, as well as Mannar district Adampan about permission for conducting the programme. Moreover, they collected videos and photographs of the street drama and personal details of the team members and even prohibited people to share any information to the media about what was happening.

We are very disappointed that the new government's promises regarding protecting human rights, respecting the freedom of assembly and association, as well as resolving the critical issues in the north and promoting reconciliation are proved to be empty words and gestures showing the international community after the series of unlawful intervention. The ongoing discussions about the political solution to be included in the constitutional reform, which is highly publicized through the government's media campaign, is not transparent and has failed the war-affected communities' expectation. We solemnly urge the government to stop their control over civil society and we look forward to seeing the government shows goodwill to people towards the national reconciliation process.

Despite the intervention, nearly 4,000 people have come forward and participated in the street drama and the social forum after the show so far. Villagers shared with the parade team about their current situation and concerns of their issues and we realized the problems facing by people in the north and east remain untouched after January 8<sup>th</sup>. AFRIEL believes that reconciliation bases on revealing the truth about injustice and victims' voices must be heard by the public. In the current context of the frail illusion of peace, the parade team will travel to the south in the mid November, initiating dialogues directly with the southern society regarding these concerns for promoting mutual understanding between ethnic groups. This youth team will continue their engagement with the groups who have been long time ignored by the mainstream society during their travel and call the government for bringing these issues to the table and giving immediate solutions for people with grievances.



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