

Kathmandu – Nepal preparation of the WWC 2016

COUNTRY REPORT – SRI LANKA

Introduction

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is an island lying close to the South East coast of the Indian sub continent. Its land area is 64,630 square kilometers and for administrative purpose the country is divided into nine Provinces. The total population is nearly twenty million. The female population is greater, women representing 51.14% of the total, comparing Men 48.86%.



Political Situation in Sri Lanka,

In November 2014, the government lifted a two-term limit for the president. President Rajapaksa then called for early elections, bolstered by a strong economy and an unorganized opposition. Rajapaksa has maintained popularity since 2009, when the army defeated the insurgent Tamil Tigers after a long, bloody civil war. However, some have begun to criticize him for increasing authoritarianism. Elections were held in January 2015, and Maithripala Sirisena, a former health minister, defeated Rajapaksa, 51% to 48%. It was a stunning upset for Rajapaksa. Sirisena vowed to clean up the office of president and transfer some of its power to the prime minister. Ranil Wickremesinghe became prime minister, and the two formed an alliance and set about to rescind some of the authoritarian implemented under Rajapaksa.

Rajapaksa hoped his coalition would win a majority in August 2015's parliamentary elections and therefore propel him to become prime minister. However, voters rejected his coalition and instead bolstered President Sirisena's.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has topped the UNP Colombo district list with 500,566 votes. The inaugural session of the eighth Parliament is held on the 1st September at 9.30 am. Afterwards, United National Party (UNP) MP Karu Jayasuriya will reportedly be elected as the Speaker of the new Parliament.

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa has confirmed he will assume duties as an Opposition MP while stating that he accepts the results of the parliamentary elections with humility. The former President who contested at the parliamentary elections as a UPFA candidate from the Kurunegala district, in a statement thanked the voters, activists and the people's representatives of the UPFA who contributed to the election campaign.

New President, New cabinet of ministers and also house of representatives we hope to have an new awakening in the country. New government introduced the new manifesto to address the current issues. There are 27 cabinet ministers, 9 state ministers and 8 deputy ministers. But the gender balance is not so good, but there simply aren't enough women MPs to fill more seats, Diversity under the percentage of women and men participation in the Parliament as 93.2% of Male participation and 6.8% of female participation.

Women's Situation in Sri Lanka

Although there are no legal impediments to the participation of women in politics or government, the social mores in some communities limit women's activities outside the home, and the percentage of women in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population.

In November 1994, a woman was elected President for the first time; she was reelected in December 1999 for a second term. Eleven women held seats in the Parliament that completed its term in August 2000. In addition to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Women's Affairs, and the Minister of Social Services, a number of women held posts as deputy ministers in the last parliament. Of the 5,000 candidates for the October 2000 parliamentary elections, 116 were women and 7 of them won seats in the October elections. Only one woman (Minister of Women's Affairs) was appointed to the new cabinet formed after the December 5 elections.

At present there are only 4.8% women in parliament and according to 1997 statistics, there were a mere 3.4%, 2.6% and 1.7% women representatives respectively in Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas.

The quota system can be used as an effective tool to increase women's participation in politics. In 1997 Sri Lanka's government proposed a constitutional reform, which contained a 25% reservation for women at the local government level. However, little progress has been done and the provision was not even stated in the August 2000 constitutional reform. The reason given by the government was that the Muslim and Tamil parties felt that they would not be able to find sufficient women candidates.

Women have equal rights under national, civil, and criminal law. However, issues related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are adjudicated by the customary law of each ethnic or religious group. The minimum age of marriage for women is 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continue to follow their customary marriage practices. The application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group often results in discrimination against women.

Education is another matter. Although the percentage of Sri Lankan women entering universities increased from 42% in 1989 to 52% in 1999 (bearing in mind that only 1% of the population has access to university education), women are still under-represented in many disciplines, and tend to find employment at the bottom of the employment pyramid.

The Constitution provides for equal employment opportunities in the public sector. However, women have no legal protection against discrimination in the private sector, where they sometimes are paid less than men for equal work, often experience difficulty in rising to supervisory positions, and face sexual harassment. Women constitute approximately one-half of the formal work force. When they do find work, it is usually in low-status, low-skilled and low-paying jobs in peasant and plantation agriculture. In addition to this, the female unemployment rate, at 22%, is double that of men in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, a majority of jobs available to women are in the unorganized and informal sectors, which are outside the purview of labor regulations. An example of this is the growing number of women engaged in the garment industry, who are prone to suffer physical disabilities directly linked to long hours of hard labor.

Sexual assault, rape, and spousal abuse (often associated with alcohol abuse) continue to be serious and pervasive problems. Amendments to the Penal Code introduced in 1995 specifically addressed sexual abuse and exploitation and modified rape laws to create a more equitable burden of proof and to make punishments more stringent. Marital rape is

considered an offense in cases of spouses living under judicial separation, and laws govern sexual molestation and sexual harassment in the workplace. Women's need Autonomy, Dignity and Democracy, and they need the equal rights among men and women, but there is no gender equality, but women were suffering with the mental and physical harassments,

Very recent cases I would like to share,

- Teen Girl-18 Gang Raped and Killed At Kytes - Jaffna in Sri Lanka.
- Disappearance of journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda
- Four and half year girl raped and killed in last week,

Health Situation

Now we are facing a big burning problem under the kidney disease, comes from Pesticide, Chronic kidney disease (CKD) has become a major health problem in rural Sri Lanka. Previously confined to North Central and Uva provinces, it is now prevalent in the Northwestern, Eastern, Southern and Central provinces, and parts of the Northern provinces.

Most of those living in these poverty-stricken districts are paddy and chena (slash and burn) cultivators. Many of the victims are male farmers and agricultural labourers. Growing numbers of cases, however, are being reported among women and children.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 15 percent of the population aged 15-70 years in the North Central and Uva provinces are affected with CKD. Over 22,000 deaths from the disease have been recorded in the Anuradhapura district in the North Central Province since CKD was first identified in 1991.

Over 1,100 CKD patients are hospitalised per month in Sri Lanka and 300 deaths recorded per year. The death rate, however, is actually higher than this because many of the victims die at home.

Despite the increasing spread of CKD, its root cause has still not been definitely established. Some researchers argue that it is caused by water polluted with "unique hydro chemicals." Many small farmers use large quantities of low-quality fertilizer and toxic agro-chemicals to boost their harvests and compete against larger producers.

The failure over the past two decades to identify the source of the CKD epidemic is an indictment of successive Sri Lankan governments and the private profit system. Hundreds of lives could have been saved utilizing new developments in medical science.

Scientist recommended several measures to control the disease and provide some relief for its victims. These include regulating fertilizers and agro-chemicals and the provision of safe drinking water to the CKD-affected areas, better health facilities and financial support for the victims. Mendis has called for immediate "multi-sectoral measures" to reduce people, especially children's, exposure to suspected toxins as a "top priority."

President Mahinda Rajapakse's government received several reports from scientist, farmer organization and many more , including in 2009 and 2012. The reports were not published or made widely available, and their recommendations were largely ignored. The government banned some low-quality fertilizers containing glyphosate and carbofuran in 2011 but then lifted the ban under pressure from agro-chemical companies.

Lack of clean drinking water and extensive use of low-quality fertilizers are regarded as major factors in CKD's spread. Only 40 percent of Sri Lanka's people have access to pipe-born water, with 15 out of 25 of the country's rural districts still dependant on ground water.

Situation in Garment Industry,

Garment industry has been the Sri Lanka's largest gross export earner since 1986 and accounted for more than 52 per cent of total export earnings of the country. It is also the country's largest net foreign exchange earner since 1992. Sri Lanka as a garment exporter has shown signs of improvement in many respects yet even at present, the quota system covers more than 52 per cent of the country's garment exports. However, Sri Lanka depends on quotas much less than other South Asian countries. Besides, dependence on the quota system, there are weaknesses in the domestic industrial and export structure, labour markets rigidities and strong competition in international markets. They need urgent attention for survival in a quota free market. Therefore, the future of the garment industry will depend on the competitive edge that Sri Lanka has over her competitors in Asia, Latin and Central America and emerging producers in Africa and Eastern Europe who benefit from favorable trading arrangements with major markets. This analysis shows that, phasing out of quotas will close down nearly fifty per cent of existing garment factories, as they loss that protection. However, some of the medium and large scale factories are expected to survive exploiting opportunities in the free market. Sri Lanka's garment industry is highly concentrated in large scale factories. That concentration will save a large part of export earnings while preserving job opportunities. However, in the short-run there will be an adverse impact on employment

Mainly the struggles are coming with the globalization, economic crisis, financial crisis and also the climate crisis,

A strong women's movement, Women's institutions and organizations can change this situation, and if women's were united will never be defeated.