

Focus Group Research Report
for
Sri Lanka Reconciliation Forum - Sydney



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Table of Contents	Page
Executive summary	2
Background	3
Purpose of the project	3
Research methods	3
Schedule of questions for first two focus groups (and individual interviews)	6
Schedule of questions for third (mixed) focus group	6
Findings	7
1. Summary of Sinhalese focus group + Tamil focus group + Tamil interviews	7
2. Summary of mixed Sinhalese/Tamil focus group	9
Further research	11
Conclusion	11
References	13
Expression of Interest Invitation (original Sinhalese + Tamil mail-out)	14
Expression of Interest Invitation (subsequent Tamil-only mail-out)	17
Information and Consent form (ethics requirement)	20
Appendix 1: Sinhalese focus group + Tamil focus group + Tamil interviews	23
Appendix 2: Mixed Sinhalese/Tamil focus group	51

Executive summary

A focus group research project was undertaken to investigate the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of Sri Lankans resident in New South Wales regarding their views on reconciliation. Three focus groups were held in January and February 2013. The first two were of single ethnicity (Sinhalese and Tamil, respectively) and the third was of mixed ethnicity (Sinhalese, and Tamil). As it was difficult to recruit Tamil participants willing to participate in a focus group, a further three individual interviews were held with Tamil participants. In summary, seven Sinhalese and six Tamils participated in this study. They ranged in age from 44 to 72, and included four females (two in each ethnic group). The participants' residency in New South Wales ranged from 10 to 28 years. The main overall findings of the focus group research are the following:

1. At an individual interpersonal level, there was no fear of or prejudice towards the other ethnic group. Any such fear or prejudice seems to be a function of when individuals come together to form groups, associations, political parties, etc.
2. The importance of an inclusive language policy was a recurring theme in the discussions. Constructive suggestions included each ethnic group having access to training in the other's language, or having access to interpreters when dealing with government agencies, or having English more widely promoted as a unifying language for all Sri Lankans.
3. The importance of promoting economic development and increasing economic growth was also seen to be a good way forward to benefit all Sri Lankans and to perhaps reduce tensions from what could be intractable problems of reconciliation.
4. Views differed as to whether Tamils should be considered a "minority" or a "distinct community", and what the implications of this were for a democratic system of government. Tamils expressed the view that they would always be subject to rule by politicians elected by a majority of Sinhalese who might not address the Tamil community's chief concerns.
5. Regarding the way forward toward a lasting reconciliation between the two ethnic communities, no common path was identified. Most of the Sinhalese participants expressed a wish to 'set aside the past, move on and enjoy the peace'; while most of the Tamil participants wanted an external intervention to investigate war crimes as a precondition for moving forward. Some Sinhalese voiced strong opposition to any outside government or United Nations involvement in Sri Lanka's post-civil war era.

Background

In mid-2012, the Sri Lanka Reconciliation Forum – Sydney (SLRF-S) was awarded federal government funding to conduct a research project titled “Post-Conflict Reconciliation among the Sri Lankan Diaspora in NSW Project”. The project was funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) through its ‘Diversity and Social Cohesion’ Program.

In August 2012, Dr Stephen Moore, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at Macquarie University, was formally approached to undertake the focus group component of the larger project. He was subsequently contracted to perform this work on the basis of his previous experience in conducting focus group research, his background in political science as well as linguistics, his familiarity with Sri Lanka and post-conflict societies (i.e. Cambodia), and his perceived neutrality in terms of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of the focus group research was to investigate attitudes, beliefs and opinions of Sri Lankans resident in New South Wales regarding their views on reconciliation. In broad terms, the project aimed to understand the views of members of various communities of Sri Lankans in greater Sydney, and to contribute to facilitating and promoting reconciliation amongst and between these communities. In more specific terms, the research sought to identify some of the sources of mistrust, prejudice and fear among these communities and, where possible, to identify some of the root causes of these feelings.

Research methods

In September and October, discussions were held between Dr Moore (henceforth ‘the researcher’) and the SLRF-S Research Sub-committee responsible for the overall project. These took place face-to-face and via email correspondence. The scope of the focus group research was established and the methods for recruiting participants, collecting data and analysing data were agreed. A formal ethics application was lodged with the Ethics Committee at Macquarie University in September and final approval to conduct the research was granted on 17th December 2012.

To recruit participants for the focus group research, the researcher was provided with the names and contact details of 100 Sri Lankans with Sinhalese-sounding names and 100 Sri Lankans with Tamil-sounding names. These two lists were prepared by the SLRF-S Research Sub-committee using the current publicly available Sydney telephone directory. The first mail-out was sent to 75 potential participants on 20th December. The mail-out comprised three documents: (1) an Expression of Interest Flyer; (2) political descriptors for self-identification, and dates available for attending a focus group; and (3) an Information and Consent form to be signed as a requirement for participating in this project. (Copies of these documents are provided below, after Reference list).

The research design involved holding three separate focus groups, all with different participants. One would be exclusively Sinhalese, one exclusively Tamil, and one a mix of Sinhalese and Tamil. Recruitment of participants for the Sinhalese focus group was relatively easy and this focus group, comprising seven participants (including two females), was held on 23rd January 2013. Recruitment of participants for the Tamil focus group was difficult and required two further mail-outs and subsequent telephone calls. In the end, a focus group

comprising three participants (including one female) was held on 2nd February. To supplement this focus group, and to meet the expressed wishes of potential participants, individual one-to-one interviews were held with three other Tamil participants (including one female) in late January and early February. Following the security protocol agreed with the Ethics Committee, the mixed focus group was comprised of participants who had also participated in either of the other focus groups or individual interviews. In the event, three Sinhalese participants (including one female) and three Tamil participants (including one female) constituted the mixed focus group, which was held on 9th February. Table 1 provides a summary profile of the 13 participants in this focus group study.

Table 1 Profile of participants

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age (approx.)	Years residing in Australia	Participation
Al	Sinhalese	50	22	FGp 1
Jill	Sinhalese	44	23	FGp 1
Mike	Sinhalese	53	15	FGp1
Pete	Sinhalese	60	10	FGp 1
Sam	Sinhalese	58	25	FGp 1 + FGp 3
Sue	Sinhalese	46	29	FGp 1 + FGp 3
Tom	Sinhalese	52	20	FGp 1 + FGp 3
Anne	Tamil	64	28	FGp 2
Chris	Tamil	56	24	FGp 2
Dave	Tamil	56	20	FGp 2
Nancy	Tamil	50	25	Int + FGp 3
Richard	Tamil	55	18	Int + FGp 3
Ryan	Tamil	72	28	Int + FGp 3

The average age of participants was 55.1 years (Sinhalese 51.8 years; Tamil 58.8 years); and the average period of residency in Australia was 22.1 years (Sinhalese 20.6 years; Tamil (23.8 years).

It should be noted that expressions of interest from potential participants were checked in terms of their self-reported political opinion so that the researcher could anticipate the likelihood of disagreements arising in the focus groups. This could happen, for example, if participants held views at opposing ends of the political descriptor continuum. It was also helpful in guiding the researcher's decisions as to which participants would be invited to participate in the mixed ethnicity focus group. Tables 2 and 3 locate the political views of, respectively, the Sinhalese and Tamil participants.

Table 2 Summary of Sinhalese participants' political views

Political descriptor	Participant
Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country. Minorities have no rights as such; they should be grateful for being allowed to live in Sri Lanka.	-
Minorities may have suffered some disadvantages, but they are not significantly more disadvantaged than	Pete; Tom; Jill;

members of the majority community. Problems faced by the minorities are mainly economic and social rather than ethnic in nature.	
Minorities have suffered in the past, but not to the extent to which it is portrayed. Limited devolution (e.g. District councils) may be necessary, but anything further could be problematic.	Al; Sue; Sam; Mike
Minorities in Sri Lanka have suffered significant discrimination and lack of protection. Only significant devolution of power (e.g. Federal states, or separate nation state) can ensure their safety and rights are respected.	-

Table 3 Summary of Tamil participants’ political views

Political descriptor	Participant
No solution to the ethnic issue is possible within a single country (Sri Lanka). Separation from Sri Lanka is the only answer.	Dave
A solution to the ethnic issue is possible within a single country, but there should be significant devolution of power, e.g. Federal states.	Anne; Chris; Richard; Ryan
A solution is possible within a single country with very little devolution, e.g. District councils.	Nancy
There is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka and there is no need for regional devolution. People of all ethnicities should have the same rights in all parts of the country.	-

Over 6.5 hours of data were recorded, which were subsequently professionally transcribed in 160 pages of transcripts. These transcripts were then ‘validated’ (to ensure that everything spoken on the recordings was in fact transcribed) and ‘cleaned’ (to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate renditions of what was said). The cleaning of the data was particularly important given the strong accents and tendency for utterances to overlap during the focus group or interview sessions.

The questions asked in the first two focus groups and the individual interviews were the same (see first schedule below), and the answers to these questions are provided in full in Appendix 1, and in summary form in the Findings section below. The questions themselves had been developed by SLRF-S Research Sub-committee and the researcher, following best practice for focus group research (see Reference list), including being piloted both with a Research Assistant and a Sri Lankan non-participant. For the mixed focus group, a new set of questions was developed (see second schedule below), again in collaboration between SLRF-S Research Sub-committee and the researcher. The answers to these questions are provided in full in Appendix 2, and in summary form in the Findings section below.

Schedule of questions for first two focus groups and individual interviews

1. Please tell me your new 'name', how long you've lived in Australia, and what cities you've lived in here.
2. When you hear the word 'reconciliation', what comes to mind?
3. What involvement have you had, if any, in the Sri Lankan community in NSW?
4. Do you socialise with other Sri Lankans living in New South Wales? And, if so, are most of your friends Sinhalese (Tamil), or is it a mix?
5. Do you think it is harder to mix with a Sinhalese (Tamil) person than with a Tamil (Sinhalese) person? [If yes], what do you think are some of the reasons for this?
6. In a social gathering -- e.g. a work function or a school P & C function --, are you likely to introduce yourself to someone who has a sub-continental appearance but whom you haven't met before? And if so, are you likely to withdraw from them if you find out that the person is a Sinhalese (Tamil)?
7. Do you think Sinhalese (Tamils) are less trustworthy than Tamils (Sinhalese)? [If yes], what are some of the reasons you think so?
8. Did you form this opinion after you arrived in Australia/NSW or when you were living in Sri Lanka or in a third country?
9. What do you think it would take to make you change this opinion?
10. Do you fear Sinhalese (Tamils)? [If yes], what are the reasons that make you fear them?
11. Did you form this opinion after you came to Australia, or when you were living in Sri Lanka?
12. If you fear Sinhalese in Australia, what makes you fear them here?
13. What is your opinion about Sinhalese (Tamils) in general?
14. What do you think it would take to make you change that opinion?
15. Do you think Sinhalese (Tamils) are prejudiced against Tamils (Sinhalese)?
16. What do think are some of the factors that might have led to the formation of this prejudice?
17. What are the reasons these prejudices exist here in Australia?
18. What do you think will make them change that prejudice?
19. What can Sri Lankans in NSW do to help Sri Lankan society recover and heal?
20. Can you tell me 3 positive things about Sri Lanka, no matter how small?
21. Of all the things we discussed today, which one is most important to you?
22. Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn't?

Schedule of questions for third (mixed) focus group

1. Please tell us your 'new' name and what year you were last in Sri Lanka.
2. I'd like you to describe a 'healthy' multicultural society.
3. How do you feel about the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka?
4. What do you think is the greatest impediment to the peace process in Sri Lanka?
5. Looking at the 'descriptors' for Sinhalese political opinion, do they seem broadly accurate to you? If not, why not? Is there an important opinion not represented?
6. As per previous question, but for Tamil political opinion.

7. What do these descriptors suggest to you, if anything, about the reconciliation process?
8. What would be the key components necessary for reconciliation in Sri Lanka?
9. Is there an existing model for reconciliation that should be adopted/adapted for Sri Lanka? (e.g. Truth & Reconciliation Commission in South Africa; UN Tribunal in Cambodia)
10. What is your view on Sri Lankan asylum seekers (i.e. 'boat people') coming to Australia?
11. Suppose you had 1 minute to speak privately with (Prime minister) Julia Gillard about reconciliation in Sri Lanka. What would you say?
12. Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn't?

Findings

The overall findings of this focus group research project have been set out in the Executive summary. More detailed findings are set out below, as summaries from the edited transcripts found in Appendices 1 and 2. A word of caution is advised in interpreting the results presented here as findings. First, the focus group and interview participants were not a representative sample of the population of Sri Lankans living in NSW. Although they were nominated for potential participation only on the basis of their names and their Sydney residence, the actual participants partly 'self-selected' on the basis of convenience and availability to participate on certain dates. Also, approximately 27 potential participants who lived in apartment accommodation did not receive the mail-out letter since Australia Post apparently does not deliver mail where the unit number of apartment addresses is not identified (and this was the case for all such accommodation listed in the Sydney telephone directory). So, the actual participants as a group were perhaps relatively better off since they all resided in non-apartment accommodation. Also, there were no young (i.e. under 44 years old), poor, or poorly educated participants.

Second, the researcher has not provided an interpretive account of the results because that was beyond the scope and resources available for this study. Moreover, a key aim of the focus group project was to provide data that could inform the questions to be asked in the follow-up component of the larger research study, namely the questionnaire survey to be directed to the wider Sri Lankan community living in New South Wales. To achieve this aim, it is desirable to have a fuller account of what was discussed in the focus groups and interviews, rather than a narrow one.

1. Summary of Sinhalese focus group + Tamil focus group + Tamil interviews

- Views about what comes to mind when the word 'reconciliation' is heard are quite similar between both ethnic groups (i.e. Sinhalese and Tamils).
- Most participants have some involvement with the Sri Lankan community in NSW.
- Most participants socialise with other Sri Lankans living in NSW, and have a mix of friends of different ethnicity. However, most friends tend to be of same ethnicity as participant.

- Mixing with people of other ethnic group is not harder than mixing with own group.
- No participant would try to withdraw from an encounter with a stranger who turned out to be from the other ethnic group.
- Each side finds the other trustworthy as individuals (apart from politicians, for some participants), but as groups there is distrust.
- Participants' opinions about trust (when expressed) were formed in Sri Lanka, not in Australia.
- Sinhalese participants did not generally fear Tamils, however several Tamils did fear Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. This opinion about fear was formed in Sri Lanka for one participant and in Australia for another.
- Opinions about the other ethnic group are generally favourable. Some Sinhalese felt that Tamils were more conservative and more insular.
- Both sides feel there is some level of prejudice of one side against the other, although many participants claimed not to have personally experienced it.
- Factors claimed to contribute to prejudice:
 - Sinhalese participants: suffering over decades; propaganda and susceptibility to propaganda; fearing the unknown; ignorance; perceptions of the army as being a "Sinhalese army".
 - Tamil participants: religious leaders; politicians; "rewriting of history"; feeling as 2nd class citizens; envy; unfairness caused by government policies.
- What Sri Lankans in NSW can do to help:
 - Sinhalese participants: reducing/stopping intimidation; being unequivocal about wanting peace; stop fundraising for protests; speak out for reconciliation; encourage community leaders to advocate for more inclusive language policies re HSC exams in NSW; encourage the rise of moderates in community leadership; help the people in the north and east of Sri Lanka.
 - Tamil participants: have Western governments apply pressure to Sri Lankan government; have fundraisers to collect money to send back to Sri Lanka to help people in need; involve Asian countries' governments; take a stand openly for accepting Tamils; encourage return to English language policy.
- Stating 'three positive things about Sri Lanka, no matter how small', varied across a range of features, but both Sinhalese and Tamils cited (independent of one another) natural beauty; cricket; natural resources; and hospitable people. Other things mentioned included Sri Lanka's cultural diversity; its adaptability; high intellectual

standards; well-educated and literate people; cheap health service and transport; food; tea; beaches.

- The most important issue discussed in the focus group:
 - Sinhalese participants: reconciliation, moving forward, learning; stop intimidation; at an individual level people can work together, but challenges exist at the group level; not looking back; think about things that can be done here and now.
 - Tamil participants: what can be done to help people back in Sri Lanka; what we can contribute to reconciliation; the diminishing Tamil population in Sri Lanka; economic development; importance of good role models.
- What should have been discussed in the focus group but was not:
 - Sinhalese participants: Western governments' support for Tamils; Western journalists' perceived bias towards Tamils.
 - Tamil participants: lack of freedom of speech, especially about politics; the plight of people living in the north and east of Sri Lanka; lack of punishment for perpetrators of violence; the historical facts behind the conflict; terrorism.

2. Summary of mixed Sinhalese/Tamil focus group

- Mixed views were expressed on what a “healthy multicultural society” looks like, encompassing one perspective in which individual cultural identity is preserved, one in which identity is not even noticed, one where any ‘heritage’ identity is subsumed in a national identity, and one where even the notion of multiculturalism is “passé” since people are increasingly becoming transient global citizens.
- Regarding feelings about the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka and New South Wales, a range of views was expressed. The importance of an inclusive language policy and intermarriages were voiced as positives, and it was noted that in New South Wales the communities were living in harmony (if perhaps separately). A lack of willingness to talk about politics was noted as a source of frustration (by a Tamil participant), and as a safety precaution (by a Sinhalese participant). One Sinhalese cited what was a recurring theme in the focus group discussion, namely “Forget the past and enjoy the peace”. One Tamil challenged that if Sinhalese were really for reconciliation, then why did they vote for a government that, he claimed, “is completely against reconciliation”.
- The discussion about the greatest impediment to the peace process in Sri Lanka brought out the clash between a Sinhalese view of “forget the past and move on” and a Tamil view of a need to first investigate war crimes before there could be any possibility of moving forward. The role of outside governments helping/hindering reconciliation in Sri Lanka was clearly related to this issue. The lack of economic development was also cited as a factor impeding the peace process, as was the innate

Sinhalese majority in electing any government, and the lack of any political clout of the Tamil minority.

- Regarding the political descriptors used in this focus group research, all participants who voiced a view agreed that the descriptors adequately covered the range of views in each ethnic community. This confirmation helps to validate the study and its positioning of the broad political views found in each community.
- Discussion of the implications for the reconciliation process of the political descriptors used in this research revealed a lament on both sides that the current “calibre of politicians” (on both ethnic sides) was below what was needed to lead a real reconciliation process.
- The key components identified as being necessary for reconciliation in Sri Lanka ranged from interpersonal attributes to political and geopolitical policies and initiatives. At an interpersonal level, honesty was cited: “If you’re honest I can feel it, and if I’m honest you can feel it, [and] that’s where the reconciliation happens”. At a government policy level, an inclusive language policy and economic development were both cited by several participants as being key issues. Also, a view was expressed that accepting Tamils as a “distinct community”, and “get[ting] rid of the discrimination and giv[ing] them equal opportunity” was also seen as a key point.
- When asked if there were an existing model for reconciliation that should be adopted or adapted in Sri Lanka, one Tamil participant was strongly in favour of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission model. However, he then acknowledged that it could only deal with the past, and not the future. The ‘Singapore’ model of government was also endorsed by several participants as a suitable one for Sri Lanka as it allowed for constancy of leadership in the interests of all ethnic groups and had its chief focus on economic development for all.
- Views expressed about Sri Lankan “boat people” asylum seekers coming to Australia suggested that the majority of them were probably economic migrants rather than political refugees. One participant noted the possibility of Australian assistance having been given to the Sri Lankan government to “keep people who want to leave the country in”, and that this was regrettable. In the case of a genuine political refugee, it was argued that illegal migration was the only realistic option open (since attempting legal travel with a valid passport was likely to result in arrest).
- When asked what each participant would say to Prime Minister Julia Gillard if they had the chance to speak to her privately for one minute about Sri Lankan reconciliation, a range of advice was given. The Sinhalese participants’ thoughts were as follows:
 - One would ask her to “teach the Australian model” of multiculturalism to the Sri Lankan government because without having to mention the words ‘reconciliation’ or ‘governance’ it is “working perfectly”.

- Another would advise her to “convince the world [i.e. especially Western powers] to get out of the country” and to “mind their own business”, rather than interfere through offers of aid with strings attached.
- The third Sinhalese participant would ask her to “invest in developing the underdeveloped areas by their funding for translation [services]...and also provide training colleges in a big scale” which could provide people especially in the north and east with skills and mobility for finding work.

The Tamil participants’ thoughts were as follows:

- One said that Prime Minister Gillard should ask the Sri Lankan government “to implement what they have said (about reconciliation, autonomy etc.).
- Another said that she should advise the Sri Lankan government “to remove (or reduce) the armed forces’ presence in Jaffna”.
- The third Tamil participant said that she should advocate for the development of a merit-based society in which “if you’re clever, you’re intelligent, you can integrate and you will...be given equal jobs, equal opportunities in the Sinhalese mainstream”.

Further research

Beyond the ‘direct’ answers to questions that have been summarised above and more fully set out in Appendices 1 and 2, other useful data were provided by the participants concerning their beliefs and attitudes towards the situation in Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan community in New South Wales. The full transcripts of the focus group discussions and individual interviews are rich data that take account of how the discussions unfolded chronologically, including how participants reacted to one another’s pronouncements and also what issues arose beyond those more narrowly prescribed by the purpose of the focus group research. A detailed linguistic analysis of these data was not within the scope of the present study, but it is expected that it will be carried out in the coming year and stand to make a valuable contribution to better understanding the views held by participants, and the underlying reasons for those views.

Subject to such further analysis of the focus group data, and the foundation that it would lay, further research could be undertaken that targeted a wider representation of the Sri Lanka diaspora living in New South Wales. An important focus of such a study would be to examine ways in which apparent existing goodwill among these Sri Lankans could be harnessed to help develop stronger intergroup relationships. It is hoped that DIAC will continue to be supportive of such efforts.

Conclusion

This focus group research has investigated attitudes, beliefs and opinions of Sri Lankans resident in New South Wales regarding their views on reconciliation. A wide range of views was expressed by the research participants, and some common positions were identified. The research was able to shed some light on the sources of mistrust, prejudice and fear among the

Sinhalese and Tamil communities, and thereby help to more clearly establish what needs to be overcome to enable and ensure a lasting reconciliation between these communities.

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Original mail-out to all potential participants:



*Inviting Expressions of Interest from
Sri Lankan Residents in NSW*

**‘Post-Conflict Reconciliation
among the Sri Lankan Diaspora in NSW’**

You are invited to participate in a research project funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) that is investigating the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of Sri Lankans who are resident in NSW. Your name was selected from a list of 200 Sri Lankan names collated from the Sydney telephone directory. Every 4th name on the list has been sent this invitation.

This project **aims** to: -

- Better understand the views of members of various communities of Sri Lankans in NSW;
- Contribute to facilitating and promoting reconciliation amongst and between these communities.

This project is seeking **Sri Lankans** who: -

- Are resident in NSW;
- Are aged 18 years and over.

This project will **involve**: -

- Participating in a **focus group discussion** lasting approximately 90 minutes with up to 7 other Sri Lankan participants. The discussion will be held at Macquarie University’s North Ryde campus in **late-January or early February 2013**, and will be moderated by Dr Stephen Moore, who is also the research project’s Chief Researcher. The discussion will be audio recorded but you will be given a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified by anyone other than the Chief Researcher. You will receive **\$50** at the end of the focus group.

If you would like to participate in this project please complete and return the attached Information and Consent form, the ‘political opinion’ form, and the brief bio-data and availability form together by email to Dr Stephen Moore, Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW 2109. **Your prompt action would be most appreciated!**

If you would like more information about this project, please contact Dr Moore by telephone at (02) 9850-8742, or by email at Stephen.Moore@mq.edu.au.

This page (both sides) to be completed and returned by email to Dr Moore at Macquarie University.

For Sinhala participants:

Please tick <u>one</u> box below that best describes your opinion	Political opinion
	Sri Lanka is a Sinhala–Buddhist country. Minorities have no rights as such, they should be grateful for being allowed to live in Sri Lanka.
	Minorities may have suffered some disadvantages, but they are not significantly more disadvantaged than members of the majority community. Problems faced by the minorities are mainly economic and social rather than ethnic in nature.
	Minorities have suffered in the past, but not to the extent to which it is portrayed. Limited devolution (e.g. District councils) maybe necessary, but anything further could be problematic.
	Minorities in Sri Lanka have suffered significant discrimination and lack of protection. Only significant devolution of power (e.g. Federal states, or separate nation state) can ensure their safety and rights are respected.

For Tamil participants:

Please tick <u>one</u> box below that best describes your opinion	Political opinion
	No solution to the ethnic issue is possible within a single country (Sri Lanka). Separation from Sri Lanka is the only answer.
	A solution to the ethnic issue is possible within a single country, but there should be significant devolution of power, e.g. Federal states.

	A solution is possible within a single country with very little devolution e.g. District Councils.
	There is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka and there is no need for regional devolution. People of all ethnicities should have the same rights in all parts of the country.

Please provide the following information to assist the researcher in organising the focus group composition and meeting arrangements:

Ethnicity: _____

Gender: _____

Age (approx): _____

Mobile telephone number: _____

Or Email address: _____

Availability to attend Focus Group:

Please tick the box to the right of each date that you are available to attend. The researcher will use this information to arrange the focus group on a single date that suits a majority of participants.

Monday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	21 January	
Tuesday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	22 January	
Wednesday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	23 January	
Thursday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	24 January	
Saturday 9.30 – 11.30 am	2 February	

[Subsequent mail-out for Tamil participants only]



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This project is seeking **Sri Lankans** who: -

- Are resident in NSW;
- Are aged 18 years and over.

This project will **involve**: -

- Participating in a **focus group discussion** lasting approximately 90 minutes with up to 7 other Sri Lankan participants of Tamil ethnicity; or in an **individual interview** lasting approximately 60 minutes. The discussion or interview will be held at Macquarie University’s North Ryde campus in **late-January or early February 2013**, and will be moderated/conducted by Dr Stephen Moore, who is also the research project’s Chief Researcher. The discussion will be audio recorded but you will be given a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified by anyone other than the Chief Researcher. You will receive **\$50** at the end of the focus group.

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This page (both sides) to be completed and returned by email to Dr Moore at Macquarie University.

Please indicate, by ticking the relevant box(es), which type of participation you would prefer:

- Focus group
- Individual interview

Please tick <u>one</u> box below that best describes your opinion	Political opinion
	No solution to the ethnic issue is possible within a single country (Sri Lanka). Separation from Sri Lanka is the only answer.
	A solution to the ethnic issue is possible within a single country, but there should be significant devolution of power, e.g. Federal states.
	A solution is possible within a single country with very little devolution e.g. District Councils.
	There is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka and there is no need for regional devolution. People of all ethnicities should have the same rights in all parts of the country.

Please provide the following information to assist the researcher in organising the focus group composition and/or interview meeting arrangements:

Ethnicity: _____

Gender: _____

Age (approx): _____

Mobile telephone number: _____

Or Email address: _____

Availability to attend Focus Group or Interview:

Please tick the box to the right of each date that you are available to attend. For focus groups, the researcher will use this information to arrange the focus group on a single date that suits a majority of participants.

Wednesday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	23 January	
Thursday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	24 January	

Monday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	28 January	
Tuesday 6.30 – 8.30 pm	29 January	
Saturday 9.30 – 11.30 am	2 February	



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Email: Stephen.Moore@ mq.edu.au

Chief Investigator's Name: Dr Stephen Moore

Information and Consent Form

Name of Project: "Post-Conflict Reconciliation among Sri Lankan Diaspora in NSW"

You are invited to participate in a study of the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of Sri Lankan residents in NSW. The purpose of the study is to better understand the variety of views held by Sri Lankans resident in NSW, with a view to facilitating and promoting reconciliation amongst and between their various communities.

The study is being conducted by Dr Stephen Moore, Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, North Ryde NSW 2109 (Tel. (02) 9850-8742; email Stephen.Moore@mq.edu.au), and is funded by the Sri Lankan Reconciliation Forum – Sydney, as part of a larger research project being funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to attend a focus group discussion or an individual interview lasting approximately 90 minutes and 60 minutes, respectively, to be held at Macquarie University's North Ryde campus. The discussion will be audio-recorded to ensure an accurate record of what was said, and the recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcriber. The discussion could potentially cause you some psychological distress given the nature of the topic, but you will be able to leave the group or terminate the interview at any time if you should feel distressed, and receive immediate counselling. If you agree to participate, you will receive \$50 cash at the end of the focus group or interview. During and after the discussion you will be provided with light refreshments.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential (*except as required by law*). No individual will be identified in any publication of the results, and only researcher will know your true identity. Members of the Sri Lanka Reconciliation Forum – Sydney may have access to the transcripts but only after each participant has been given a pseudonym. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request by contacting the researcher at his email address above in March 2013.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I, _____ (*participant's name*) have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep. (Please complete overleaf).

Participant's Name: _____

(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____

(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your

participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix 1

SLRF – Sinhalese focus group + Tamil focus group + Tamil interviews

Opening question: What is your pseudonym, how long have you lived in Australia, and what cities you've lived in here?

Sinhalese Members	Tamil Members
<p>Tom: I am Tom, I've lived [only] in Sydney for 20 years.</p> <p>Mike: I'm Mike. I just came here between 15 and 16 years ago, only in Sydney.</p> <p>Jill: My name is Jill. I've lived in Australia for 23 years. I've lived briefly in Darwin and mostly in Sydney.</p> <p>Al: My name is Al. I've lived about 22 years primarily in Sydney but worked for...extended periods in Melbourne and Canberra.</p> <p>Sue: My name is Sue. I've been in Australia for 29 years now, mainly in Sydney.</p> <p>Pete: My name is Pete. I have lived in Sydney for the whole period I have been here [which] is 10 years.</p> <p>Sam: My name is Sam. I have been in Sydney for the last 25 years.</p>	<p>Dave: I am 'Dave'. I am living...20 years in Sydney.</p> <p>Anne: I'm 'Anne' and I've lived in Sydney for the last 28 years.</p> <p>Chris: 'Chris'. I've been living in Sydney...about 24 years.</p>
	Tamil Interviewees
	<p>Rich: I am 'Richard'. I have been living here 18 years...mainly in Sydney.</p> <p>Ryan: My name is Ryan. I lived in Sydney since 1984, so I've been</p>

	<p>here about 28 years.</p> <p>Nancy: My name is Nancy...I've lived in Sydney for the past 25 and a half years, since June 1987.</p>
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Introduction question: When you hear the word 'reconciliation', what comes to mind?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
Mike: peace, for me	Chris: Something similar [to] rehabilitation.
Sam: peace	Dave: Or, they're asking to forget about everything and join together and work together....Forget everything with the past.
Sue: living together	Anne: For me, reconciliation means different groups in a society living together peacefully...In every society you find different groups of people from different backgrounds...there's always a dominant group and a smaller group and it is important in today's world to live peacefully together.
Al: forget the differences and come together	Chris: There is a lot of sorrow, a lot of people got affected...just have to overcome that sorrow and be happy and get along with life...that could be another rehabilitation part of reconciliation.
Jill: looking ahead	Anne: Probably resolving past issues and moving on.
Mike: moving forward...kind of like forgetting the past...what's happened in the past but then moving forward	
Pete: discussion on the differences and come to a common agreement	
Tom: reconciliation looks like there is a conflict and we are trying to reverse back to the previous situation like living in harmony	
Jill: acknowledging the past	
Sue: [acknowledging] the differences	

<p>Sue: learning from the past, so whatever it is, bad things or good things, they could be used...in positive and negative ways but mainly learning from it and moving forward</p>	
	<p>Rich: Reconciliation means somehow come to an agreement to a problem, a longstanding problem and live in peace.</p> <p>Ryan: Two people, or anyone who has had a disagreement coming together and resolving their differences and making friendship or maybe becoming friends or whatever, or at least talk to each other.</p> <p>Nancy: I have heard the word 'reconciliation' in Australia in the context of the Aboriginal reconciliation....Because I'm a trained accountant, we use the word reconciliation day in, day out, about balancing, having everything balanced and reconciled to a bottom line, so that's what pops in my mind. But, in the context of Sri Lanka it's about living in harmony, people of different races and people who speak different languages....To me reconciliation means getting back to that stage where everybody (Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers) lived in harmony.</p>

Transition question: What involvement have you had, if any, in the Sri Lankan community in NSW?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Mike: volunteer work, doing community projects...[for example] collecting funds [for tsunami victims]</p> <p>Tom: cultural activities or cultural promotional activities, fund raising for cultural organisations as well as religious places, educating</p>	<p>Dave: We have our normal Tamil churches.</p> <p>Chris: There's no Sri Lankan holidays, there is only special...New Year's Day or something...when we all go to the temple...that's the culture actually.</p>

<p>children about the culture</p> <p>Pete: doing fundraising for hospital projects or for...religious activities...participating in a few cultural activities</p> <p>Sam: [involved in] SPUR (Society for Peace, Unity and Human Rights for Sri Lanka)...involved in my professional field in the Sri Lankan community and also in sports</p> <p>Sue: funding schools...tsunami [victims]...soldiers who have come back</p> <p>Al: limited [to tsunami relief]...doing country voluntary work in Sri Lanka</p> <p>Jill: sponsor a child in Sri Lanka</p>	<p>Anne: I was not born in Sri Lanka, I have very little association with Sri Lanka. My parents emigrated from Sri Lanka to Malaysia, and me and my siblings were born in Malaysia....When I arrived [in Australia] I just assimilated into the society and lived the life without worrying about my Sri Lankan origin.</p>
	<p>Rich: I've been part of a Tamil church, I've been part of other Tamil organisations, just cultural as well as others. Almost exclusively [Tamil organisations].</p> <p>Ryan: I've not been involved in any political activities....I have taken part in Sri Lankan activities...that are associations, we've got social functions like dinner dances.</p> <p>Nancy: I'm born a Sri Lankan Tamil, [so] by virtue of that and the extended family we have family get together, weddings, but on a day-to-day life...I belong to the mainstream Australian world...I don't interact with Sri Lankans at all at work.... If there's a fundraiser we would attend, or [if] the temple has a function we would attend that...[But] we distanced ourselves (from integrating further with the Sri Lankan community in NSW), my husband and I, because to us involving meant</p>

	trouble...you get tarred with the same brush [as other Tamils].
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Investigate levels of social interaction (as background):

1. Do you socialise with other Sri Lankans living in NSW? And, if so, are most of your friends Sinhalese (Tamil), or is it a mix?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
Jill: to some extent and my friends are a mix...Tamils, Sinhalese, Euro-Anglo Sri Lankans	Dave: [Yes]. In my case most of them are Tamil...the reason [is] that after 2009 [and the casualties at end of the war] I just [distanced myself] a little bit away from them. They never came and said sorry for what happened...I feel very, very sorry about it when this incident happened not a single person invites me as a friend to come and say [sorry].
Al: same here and Burghers, Malay	Chris: [Yes]. I don't discriminate because I have got quite a few Sinhalese friends as well...but then they [in NSW] are also helpless actually [regarding the end of the war]...In my workplace [I] also work with Sinhalese. [We] just get along like a sort of family actually...we don't differentiate...at least on friendship.
Pete: friendship with everybody, but mainly moving with...my ethnic group	Anne: No [socialising with other Sri Lankans living in NSW].
Sam: mixed group of friends, proportionately maybe more Sinhalese...very good friends who are Burghers, Muslim and Tamil	
Sue: a mixture of all communities	
Mike: Sinhalese and Tamil communities live separately in Sydney...for the past 10 years...I only knew Sinhalese people here...we do have Tamil friends who we knew from Sri Lanka... we have been associating with them...but everyone else then they're Sinhalese.	
Mike: one thing is probably religion...there is a food fair run by the Buddhist temple so I'm Buddhist...we don't go to Hindu temple fundraising events	

<p>Tom: I'm pretty similar...who I'm involved with...mainly probably 99.9% Sinhalese...I do still have Tamil friends</p>	
	<p>Rich: Most of my friends are Tamil...I have...Sinhalese colleagues...[whom I would consider as friends]. I talk to them...except [about] politics.</p> <p>Ryan: Yes, we do (socialise with other Sri Lankans living in NSW). Most of our friends are Tamils but we've got Sinhalese friends too who come to our parties and we invite them to dinners and lunches and so on and we go to their place.</p> <p>Nancy: [Per answer to previous question] Some mixture (of) Australians.</p>

2. Do you think it is harder to mix with a Tamil (Sinhalese) person than with a Sinhalese (Tamil) person? [If yes], what do you think are some of the reasons for this?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Al: it's the same</p>	<p>Chris: [We can mix as easily with one or the other]</p>
	<p>Rich: Individually, no. Individually Sinhalese are as good as Tamil, I mean, when it comes to mixing, talking. Yeah, talking anything other than politics, you can talk very freely.</p> <p>Ryan: Not really...they are quite nice people. Sinhalese people are quite nice. We have a lot of friends, Sinhalese friends.</p> <p>Nancy: No...well...I need to rephrase that, people from the like background, similar social backgrounds....If you're from a</p>

	similar social...socio-economic background you have the same values and values is what makes people the same.
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3. What about if you are in a context where you were meeting a new person and they appear to be sub-continental in appearance and you find out they're Tamil (Sinhalese) rather than Sinhalese (Tamil), would that make you want to withdraw?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Al: no, personally not for me</p> <p>Pete: we just talk to them and then it depends on how the conversation goes...how friendly they are...we go further whether it's Sinhalese or Tamil</p> <p>Mike: in my case...if I come across let's say a Tamil person in my workplace...as opposed to...an Australian person...we would at least try...[to] find a connection with that person because of the same...country</p> <p>Sam: I have always gone out of the way to build up friendships. I find the majority of them are very closed</p>	<p>This question not asked in Tamil Focus Group</p>
	<p>Rich: Not necessarily, no.</p> <p>Ryan: Well, generally I'm friendly, I try to make friends or at least talk to people if I'm in a place where there is someone, I like to talk to them. Not necessarily sub-continent, even some strangers like you [Caucasian interviewer]. [If they turned out to be Sinhalese would I consider withdrawing from the interaction?] No, definitely not. Absolutely not...I would be quite pleased in fact, I'll be happy to talk to them...provided they are happy to talk to me.</p>

	Nancy: No. (Categorically). Because, you think, well, they too have left Sri Lanka and they're here, why are they here, what hurt them...because they don't have a reason to leave so you'd think there must be some common thread there...
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Investigate deeper opinion about the 'other':

1. Do you think Tamils (Sinhalese) are less trustworthy than Sinhalese (Tamil)? [If yes], what are some of the reasons you think so?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
Tom: I couldn't say	Dave: I don't agree on that point.
F: No	Chris: [They are as trustworthy].
Al: At an individual level, no	Dave: Just...not the politicians. Just normal people [are trustworthy].
Mike: I don't think so	Chris: Not the politicians.
F: No, not in my experience	Anne: I think you've got to look at the individuals. I think they're just human beings....Aside from politicians, they are just normal human beings and trustworthy as the Australians or Greeks are...
Tom: Trust [has] got nothing to do with ethnicity...trust has got to do with the personality of the person	
Pete: You should go back to this war time in Sri Lanka...I just came 10 years ago here, so as a group we had the suspicions that we should not trust them [Tamils], to be honest	
Jill: In terms of reconciliation as a group there is still a question...about whether the Tamil community as a whole	

wants to work towards that in a positive way...it's a question of trusting whether that's heading in the right direction as a community rather than an individual level

Tom: A recent example, is like the Tamil National...TNA...Sampanthan has...said Okay, we give up a separate state demand, but he went back to his 'meeting'...[and] they renewed their constitution which says their primary aim is to divide, so where's the trust, which one do you trust?

Sue: And they wanted to maintain the 13th amendment. They didn't want that gone because that's India's brainchild...that distributed power on a provincial basis within Sri Lanka and that has since been regarded as one of the biggest mistakes ever, but Sampanthan doesn't want that gone, he wants that to be maintained.

Al: I think the contentious issues were always the police powers and the land and so those were not devolved, the 13th amendment was not fully implemented because those police powers and the land matters were not fully devolved.

Tom: Devolving power is alright, I don't see any problem with that, but devolving power based on ethnicity I see a big problem...if that is the case the rest of Sri Lanka should be one provincial council.

Mike: I will trust any Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim person for anything else but when it comes to this ethnic...separate state situation...if I don't know the Tamil person I cannot trust that person.

	<p>Rich: Well, individually, the answer is ‘no’, but as a group I think they simply behave like that [untrustworthy]. That’s a problem here, in this reconciliation....that as an individual, they are very trustworthy, no problem there at all, but when it comes to as a group, suddenly they take a different position.</p> <p>Ryan: No, I don’t think so.</p> <p>Nancy: No. There’s some awful Tamil people too, you can’t trust them. They get them in every society.</p>
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2. Did you form this opinion after you arrived in Australia or when you were living in Sri Lanka?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
Pete: It’s from Sri Lanka	Chris: It’s been always....I mean the trustworthiness is there. There’s no difference, actually.
	<p>Rich: [This question not directly asked in this interview]</p> <p>Ryan: I have had Sinhalese friends from time to time [since] when I was about 18 or so, which is when I went to uni, university in Colombo. [So, presumably Ryan’s view was formed in Sri Lanka]</p> <p>Nancy: When we were in school (in Sri Lanka).</p>

3. What do you think it would take to make you change your opinion?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
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This question not asked in this focus group	This question not asked in this focus group
	<p>Rich: Actions on the ground...by the politicians I guess, as well as others...even here overseas.</p> <p>Ryan: I'll be trusting them not because they are Sinhalese or Tamil, whether Tamils...even you won't trust...even I not like to trust, so it's not on the basis of language or ethnicity. [I would distrust someone] if they had done something which was not right or which I didn't agree with.</p> <p>Nancy: [This question not directly asked in this interview]</p>

4. Do you fear Tamils (Sinhalese)? [If yes], what are the reasons that make you fear them?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Tom: No... If I feared them I wouldn't go and buy food from them.</p> <p>Al: No, I don't think that fear is there even in Sri Lanka... The fear is against the terrorists, somebody who could be violent, not fear against the community...Even in Sri Lanka, Tamil would not fear a Sinhalese or Sinhalese a Tamil, but the individuals, the fear comes from what action that person is capable of taking.</p>	<p>Dave: I will not say here [in Australia], not what...you call the 'professional' level, but suppose I am working in Sri Lanka...I am always worried about a little bit people under our...lower grade (not that well-educated, like a servant, a driver) ...they may be a bit tough to us so I may be scared sometimes these people...can harm us or something. But since living here [in Australia] I don't need to worry about [this] we always respect each other.</p> <p>Dave: [Why I fear them is because] what do you call that facial expression and sometimes when they look at us and...the way they talk...I always thought 'they're not like us'. So even when I'm going on the road I'm a little bit scared.</p> <p>Chris: I have no fear [of Sinhalese]. It does depend [on circumstances] but I don't have any fear, even back home [in Sri Lanka]. I can</p>

	<p>manage actually; I can get along with the people.</p> <p>Anne: [I have] no fear.</p>
	<p>Rich: I don't fear them here [in Australia] but I do fear them back in Sri Lanka, yes....I mean you don't fear individuals....If you don't know somebody, a Sinhalese, then you really feel you kind of take...you don't take any....It's [being] on guard....You don't give the benefit of the doubt to [someone] being a good person...I mean most of them are, I mean of course they're harmless I suppose in that sense.</p> <p>Ryan: No, not really. When I go to Sri Lanka sometimes I'm a bit afraid because I know very little Sinhalese and because in the past... there have been so many racial violence in Sri Lanka, racial riots, and if you get caught up in one of those you'll be in trouble but fortunately...that's not happened to me.</p> <p>Nancy: As a mob, as a mob of Sinhalese who are under the influence of alcohol or some crazy leader who's brainwashed them, yeah (I fear them). As I would fear anybody, I would fear a bunch of Australians in Mt Druitt who are under the influence of drugs and they see a brown person, a yellow person...you know...it's not the Sinhalese</p>

5. Did you form this opinion after you came to Australia, or when you were living in Sri Lanka?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
This question not asked in this focus group	Chris: I don't know. In my case actually I don't have any fear against the Sinhalese...if you are nice to them they are very helpful.

	<p>Rich: While living in Sri Lanka, this is mostly [where my opinion was formed].</p> <p>Ryan: [This question not directly asked in this interview]</p> <p>Nancy: Well, when you're younger you never consider these things until it happens...It's later in life when you ponder about society...[Opinion formed after coming to Australia]</p>
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6. If you fear Tamils (Sinhalese) in Australia, what makes you fear them here?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
This question not asked in this focus group	This question not asked in this focus group
	This question not directly asked in these interviews

7. What is your opinion about Tamils (Sinhalese) in general?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Sam: I think they are very nice people and very focused on their culture, preserving their culture, but they're very, very nice people that I've had experiences with.</p> <p>Pete: They [may] be more culturally focused than Sinhalese. And a bit more hard-working.</p> <p>Tom: My general opinion is also they're very inclusive, they're very reluctant to go out of their cultural boundaries...They really solidly value their cultural things, which is not wrong...I think they're weak in that ability to mix with other people, to relate to other people.</p>	<p>Dave: They're trustworthy as like Tamils, generally.</p> <p>Chris: The only thing I don't like with the Sinhalese...when we [Tamils] have a get together...we speak in English [if any Sinhalese are present]...we accommodate...so that everybody will understand. But the Sinhalese they don't care. They'll talk their own language [in the presence of Tamils].</p>

<p>Sue: I think the generations growing up now don't have those boundaries....They treat you as a person; they value you for who you are, face value....It's just those...older generations that try to instil that type of fear, prejudice, which is wrong, I think.</p> <p>Al: If you look at India, which has a very large Tamil population in south India, they are the most conservative....[The] Sri Lankan Tamil community is highly conservative. Sinhalese are....tend to be more liberal....When we go to Jaffna or parts of northern Sri Lanka they are very conservative and that prevents them from fully integrating, easily integrating with any other community...and they want to preserve their identity...religious values etc., and that's one of the reasons of the conflict.</p> <p>Mike: You have to add 30 years of propaganda against...the Sinhalese government army...so in addition to their cultural and other values...most of them were forced to contribute...money and other things to the war, so obviously they were kind of bound to that community.</p>	
	<p>Rich: I have [Sinhalese] friends back in Sri Lanka and usually they are very nice people. I mean even some people, some Tamils would say even they are more trustworthy than the fellow Tamil. I mean that's individually, as a friend....But as a group, particularly political when it comes to politics they suddenly turn into a mob mentality or something....You would think [the] silent majority [of Sinhalese] is not for this mob mentality but they are seen voting for that...the mob, so in a sense they kind of show that they are with them...either they don't want to oppose them or they don't want to do anything about it...except</p>

	<p>[for] a few, small minority, very, very, very small minority.</p> <p>Ryan: They're quite nice people, actually. I quite like them, they're nice people. But when it comes to...this problem between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, they feel they own this country and that the Tamils are sort of intruders, people who came from India later than them and they somehow feel that we don't belong there.</p> <p>Nancy: Funny you ask me that. [I] don't have an opinion. My parents have a...my father had a very strong negative opinion but I never let that influence me....[The Sinhalese] are also hardworking ...academically inclined, academically gifted.</p>
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8. What do you think it would take to make you change your opinion?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Al: I think if they take active participation in integration [in certain events like cricket]...If we can come together in those general things [like cricket] I think there will be a change in perception on the majority of Sinhalese community that...there's a genuine desire to reconcile while recognising the differences.</p> <p>Sue: I agree...While we talk about reconciliation and living together there was part of a community that promotes division and things like the cricket protest and things like that...if they are really honest about this reconciliation moving forward, they need to show that, they need to be honest about it, and they need to come clean at the table.</p> <p>Pete: That openness is very important for this [reconciliation]</p>	<p>This question not asked in this focus group</p>

<p>because I don't know the true type...because they are constrained by their ethnicity or their culture not to be open.</p> <p>Sam: The language I find is a key issue and if people have access to learning common language which is English as well as the Sinhalese learning Tamil and the Tamils learning Sinhalese [this] will make a huge difference.</p>	
	<p>Rich: [This question not directly asked in this interview]</p> <p>Ryan: [This question was asked in this interview, but not directly answered]</p> <p>Nancy: [This question not directly asked in this interview]</p>

Investigate deeper opinion of how the 'other' perceives self:

1. Do you think Tamils (Sinhalese) are prejudiced against Sinhalese (Tamils)?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Tom: Yes, in general.</p> <p>Sue: Especially the generation that's born in the last 30 years...They look at Sinhalese people differently.</p> <p>Pete: They are brainwashed.</p> <p>Sue: The people that are coming out of the 30-year gap period...the little kids that were born in the last five, six years, they grow up accepting the fact that there was a situation like that but we can</p>	<p>Chris: There is a bit, a lot of prejudice in Sinhalese community but not just the general public. [In NSW there is no prejudice].</p> <p>Dave: I have not come across any prejudice [from the Sinhalese in NSW].</p> <p>Anne: I've not experienced any prejudice. I have Sri Lankan friends and I have to say that there is absolutely no prejudice at all and they are quite happy...living peacefully and fearlessly.</p>

<p>probably live together whereas the people that were born at the beginning of the 30-year period...they just completely don't want to have anything to do with the...</p> <p>Mike: They've been...brainwashed by their community leaders...I have [heard] stories that even kids in primary school [in Australia], Tamil families asking them not to be friendly with Sinhalese kids, so that's a very sad story.</p>	
	<p>Rich: Yeah, certainly. I think that's a main problem....They've won the war....so they (have a superiority complex) and are more prejudiced....To some extent (these prejudices exist in Australia as well). I wouldn't put a number what percentage of them are like that, but certainly it is there.</p> <p>Ryan: Some of them may be, not all of them...We've got friends, Sinhalese friends, and the Sinhalese and the Tamils get along quite well but there are certain topics (i.e. politics) we don't discuss, which is a bit sad...We are not quite open.</p> <p>Nancy: Yeah, just again [it's a case of] someone said something [revealing prejudice] and people are brainwashed [to believe it].</p>

2. What do you think are some of the factors that might have lead to the formation of this prejudice?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Mike: Because of the Tamil suffering during that 30 years of war...probably they have built up this...prejudice so they have this kind of feeling that is anti-Sinhalese, anti-government, anti-army, anti-police.</p> <p>Sue: That group of people were fed information and the prejudice</p>	<p>Chris: Say the priests actually, they are the people who started all this...They started hating the Tamil community...Telling the people who come to [the] temple... 'you better do something with these Tamils, because...Sri Lanka is Sinhalese....So that sort of prejudice is there from the monks actually.</p>

<p>came from the unknown, the fear of the unknown...If they don't know the facts, they believe what they hear when they grow up.</p> <p>Jill: Most Tamil people...who have lived in the Tamil community and then experienced or been exposed to the Sinhala and other communities will say 'oh, we didn't know that Sinhalese people are so nice and so friendly and really there's not much of a difference', so it's mostly those people who are inside the community and don't have much exposure who are forming a [prejudiced] view about Sinhalese people...[There are even reports about] living within the Tamil community in Jaffna and about the prejudices inside that structure being more overwhelming than any predudice...experienced...in the Sinhalese areas, because of the caste system and all...that's implicit inside of that.</p> <p>Al: I think the single most [important] factor is...in the last 30 years...the army was perceived as the 'Sinhalese' army, against the Tamil community and, unfortunately, that happened to a large extent because the conflict was between these two ethnic groups.</p> <p>Tom: I think that in Sri Lanka...regardless of Tamil or Sinhalese, especially in rural areas the people are not very information hungry....Whoever the person who takes leadership [in this context] in giving propaganda becomes the newsperson and whatever he says [you] believe because [you] have no information to the contrary, so I think that the brainwashing happened...mostly from politicians in rural areas. [The people] are told that 'you are safe here, don't cross the border because you are going to dangerous territory', and that might have</p>	<p>Dave: Yeah, religious [roots]...and the politicians</p> <p>Chris: Whereas in Sydney actually that prejudice is not there because you're just dealing with [people like] Anne and me [and Dave]. I mean...there's no way even if somebody preaches [to] us [to hate the Sinhalese] we don't care actually. Whereas in...villages these people, the temple authorities and the priests and monks and...the politicians, they preach [such messages and are listened to by people who do care].</p> <p>Dave: [Another factor is] re-writing history...in a different way then everybody thinks 'oh, this [country] is for them [only]....I think all the new...school books...they just completely forget...to mention the old stories anymore.</p> <p>Chris: They [the Sinhalese] tried to think that we as Tamils are second-class citizens....Buddhist, Sinhalese people, they own this land they came as first and these Tamils migrated, but this is untrue....I think both...communities came at the same time...from India, probably.</p> <p>Dave: And we also had kings and everything for different groups but everything now if you look at their books, no, you don't see anything.</p>
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<p>contributed to that prejudice and insulation.</p>	<p>Rich: Fundamentally I think there are two...issues. One is that [they are] taught from childhood particularly I think [it] is a religious [teaching]...before the colonial time, they somehow perceived the Tamils as their enemies....They [do] not really belong to Sri Lanka...they were invaders or something like that. [The second issue is that] the Tamils who are doing a little slightly better than Sinhalese...for their proportion [of the population] in all different fields...[the Sinhalese perceive that] the Tamils are somehow going to overtake them....It cannot happen but that's what they fear.</p> <p>Ryan: Maybe they are worried about their jobs or their privileges or what they have and maybe jealousy because there'll be Tamils...in the country there are Sinhalese who do well, Tamils who do well [but] it's a poor country, so there is...there can be envy of people who have got things and that they happen to be Tamils there may be a bit of jealousy and so on.</p> <p>Nancy: It's mass mania. [The language policy from the 1960s created divisions that were not previously there when English was the medium of education]. It was the politicians [who] created the divide and then people think it's unfair and even I think the civil service jobs...Sinhalese were given preferential placements and the Tamils were not.</p>
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3. What are the reasons these prejudices exist here in Australia?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Al: The older generation carry a lot of things from Sri Lanka, and I think they carried those views...and the younger generation</p>	<p>This question not asked in this focus group</p>

would have less of those views.	
	This question not directly asked in these interviews

4. What do you think will make them change that prejudice?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
Al: My view is the older we become as an individual, we struggle to change our views....I think liberal-minded individuals would change their views but others probably would not and some would have genuine scars which they find difficult to forget.	
	Rich: Well, that's a good question. I guess I don't have a good answer. No amount of, I think, telling...of our suffering or whatever...this doesn't seem to make a dent on them...they are still kind of thinking we are up to something.... Tamils joke that...the [Sinhalese] person in the group who takes the worst possible position on Tamils, he will have a say [over] everybody. Ryan: [This question not directly asked in this interview] Nancy: [This question not directly asked in this interview]

Questions to be retained from the earlier discussion:

1. What can Sri Lankans in NSW do to help Sri Lankan society recover and heal?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
Tom: I guess reducing or stopping totally the intimidation against the other group would help a lot because you go through the	Dave: Even if you sit down with about 1,000 people here and if you say something, are they [in Sri Lanka] going to accept it? No.

<p>reconciliation part, all of a sudden you see a...ethnic-based protest, you take a step...two or three steps back and you are back to your original spot again and that makes it difficult....Not to hurt the other party. How can you hurt and [then] demand a reconciliation? I don't think it will happen.</p> <p>Sue: It think there's a voice that gives rise to a lot of mistrust too. We see them wanting peace but we also see them not wanting peace....Do they want it or do they not want it?</p> <p>Al: I think in New South Wales the Tamils should first recognise their Sri Lankan heritage. If you recognise that you are a Sri Lankan first...then you support the Sri Lankan community.</p> <p>Mike: [There is in Sydney] a minority [of Tamils] who are obviously driving this [protest] force again, they have been doing it for the last 30 years, collecting money and...I think they're still doing that, I think that's the thing that we need to stop.</p> <p>Jill: So if moderate Tamils were to speak out for reconciliation and perhaps against some of these divisive things...similarly with Sinhalese, I think if Sinhalese speak out towards reconciliation I think that's a positive thing.</p> <p>Sue: At the moment the HSC curriculum includes Tamil language as an option....we don't have Sinhalese [as an option]. I know there are some Sinhalese people that are taking Tamil out of their own interest, but there's no option for Tamils to learn Sinhalese...So, it is probably the community rulers that need to rally and convince the Department [of Education and Training] so that might be one option.</p>	<p>Chris: That's a dictatorship there in Sri Lanka....a dictatorship's not going to change....It's a bit like I China. So that's why we don't bother much actually, there's no point in sitting around and chatting about what can you do for the people in Sri Lanka to recover...that's not going to happen here unless the government of Australia....or Canadian government, or British government, or US government, they impose on the dictatorship, nothing is going to happen.</p> <p>Dave: They [these governments] have to give sort of a pressure.</p> <p>Chris: The Tamil community in Sydney...want to protest to the Australian government [about the killing of innocent Tamils]....so they...went all the way to Canberra and then they mounted a protest....We all went, a lot of people went, [but] nothing happened actually. And then the genocide went on.... [So] what's the point [of joining such protests]?</p> <p>Dave: If you wanted to support a particular [group of] 100 people...they don't have any food or something, of course...we can send the money. [But] you can't change the politics over there.</p> <p>Chris: We have some cultural activity; we collect some money and then send it to [help orphanages, hungry people, people without work]</p> <p>Anne: There may be some positive effects if governments of different countries get involved in helping...to build that path [to reconciliation], and it's a complex path....I think governments...of the Asian countries around, if they do get</p>
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<p>Al: Terrorism extremist groups hijacked the leadership of the communities across the world. So if you take New South Wales, there were extremist groups...and others were passive, they had to comply because...relatives [back in Sri Lanka] were at risk. Now, there is an opportunity for the rest of the Tamil leadership to take that leadership because the fear is no longer there. There has to be [a push] to marginalise these extremist groups...and [for] a new leadership to rise, that will allow better reconciliation opportunity.</p> <p>Sam: We as Sinhalese...the best thing that we can do to reconcile is to try and help people in the north and east [who are] having a very hard time in spite of all the government and the foreign aid that was given...If we try to reach them and try to help them I think that will heal a lot of wounds if we genuinely do that. A lot of people are doing that in a small scale but if we can increase that...the Tamil community will come to realise that there is this effort made by one group and the others will follow.</p>	<p>involved I think there will be a more positive effect.</p>
	<p>Rich: Some kind of reconciliation might help, there's no question....You can't cross that bridge until the Sinhalese take a stand, that group [must] openly take a stand...this cannot happen secretly...Sinhalese have to take a stand, clearly and unequivocally....you have to be very clear and precise of what...you are prepared to accept for Tamils...and that stand, obviously the Tamils would probably...might come together in that stand.</p> <p>Ryan: Maybe encourage the Sri Lankans to go back to English, bring back English or at least...make the importance [known] of English as a language which will unite the people there...and also it'll bring us up to the rest of the world, it will bring us</p>

	<p>then opportunities. I think that going back to this language...I'm not in favour of Tamil [language] either.</p> <p>Nancy: Well, I don't know if we can do much because every time there's a new prime minister or president, with that individual comes a different mindset...It's a very interesting topic, how, it's a tiny island, in the whole scheme of things it doesn't matter and if they can't live, just two different languages, not even religion, it's not as though Hindus versus Buddhists, because it's language, not religion...We're different purely...due to the language we speak...[Functioning in English is] the only thing that's going to reconcile, there needs to be a common factor, there's nothing common in Sri Lanka, it's us and them, us and them.</p>
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2. Can you tell me three positive things about Sri Lanka, no matter how small?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Mike: The cricket team.</p> <p>Jill: It's a very resource-rich country and there's...a great opportunity for further economic development which will benefit all ethnic communities and I think that ought to be one of the primary focuses for...reconciliation. It's culturally diverse; it's beautiful.</p> <p>Mike: Sri Lankans can adapt to situations...for example, Colombo is influenced from western [and] eastern cultures.</p> <p>Pete: Intellectual [standard] is very high in Sri Lanka...Other professions...are comparable to any other country.</p>	<p>Dave: It's a very beautiful country.</p> <p>Chris: I think there you get lots of good food...a lot of good resorts...tea estates</p> <p>Dave: In a small country you can go to the mountains...you can go to the beaches...all the climates...[not expensive for tourists]</p> <p>Anne: Beautiful tea...some of the most beautiful beaches in the world...I think the people are the most beautiful people, they are very hospitable, warm, gentle.</p>

<p>Sue: Literacy....so, a well-educated population.</p> <p>Sam: People are very hospitable.</p> <p>Sue: Sri Lanka is the only country in the world that Sinhalese people live, Sinhalese is spoken. [Infrastructure] is being built.</p> <p>Al: Resilient people...highly educated...friendly, hospitable people, so I think those three provide a very, very sound basis for reconciliation.</p> <p>Mike: Free health service...and also very subsidised transport system</p>	
	<p>Rich: It's a beautiful country and it has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, as a third world country. We can be an example to the world because we have four religions...very few countries have significant amount of four religions. We have Hinduism...Buddhism...Christianity...and....Islam.</p> <p>Ryan: I've heard that the present government is trying to bring about unity through...having these three languages and so on, that is something positive, to enable communication between the two parties, two communities. I suppose cricket is good, I think...Maybe the tourism part may be helping Sri Lanka...and exposure to the rest of the world will make them [Sri Lankans] want to be part of the rest of the world...not shut in to as an island, that'll be something good.</p> <p>Nancy: It's blessed [in] natural resources; it's blessed with the beauty of the country; it's well-placed with the global timings; it's strategically placed globally to become a good business hub; tourism is a great avenue to make money...</p>

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Ending question: Of all the things we discussed today, which one is most important to you?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Sue: Reconciliation, just moving...forward....Learning</p> <p>Pete: Fresh start...it's a process.</p> <p>Tom: To me the most important thing that we talked about here is...we talked about stopping intimidating the other party you want to reconcile with. It think that's very, very important...probably step number one towards [reconciliation].</p> <p>Al: To me what I gathered from around the table [in this focus group] was that at an individual level we still continue to work together and link together...The challenges are at the group levels. The second point I would make is that has to be given by the leadership, it's about Tamil community and Sinhalese community leadership needs to drive that and I think the Australian government has, given this is funded by DIAC, [it] has a leadership responsibility...to make sure communication and the messages are moving forward, not looking back to the UN [security] council and saying 40,000 civilians were killed. We don't know how many were killed but that's looking backwards.</p> <p>Jill: It's important to acknowledge the past, but not to live in the past and rehash it through journalism or individual experiences but to think about where we're going to do X, Y and Z things that we can do now, here and now, be it the interpreter service,</p>	<p>Chris: [The issue of] is there anything we could do to help the people back at home.</p> <p>Dave: I don't think we can do anything.</p> <p>Anne: I think the path, of how can we assist in the reconciliation. What can we do to contribute to the reconciliation, like, for instance, in focus groups to get our thoughts so that...DIAC can put together our feelings and thoughts...</p>

<p>be it having leaders that speak up...strongly against groups that might be trying to be divisive, and those kinds of things.</p>	
	<p>Rich: For me...it's probably the settlement, I mean otherwise...Tamils are doomed....In 10 years' time...nobody will say that he's a Tamil in Sri Lanka. That's the scenario we are moving towards, so it's kind of total extermination or I mean I call it 'from genocide to extermination'....The numbers [of Tamils] are going down so far and... more Tamil people are overseas and more people are leaving [at] any opportunity....The [Tamil] population has come down to half in the north and east.</p> <p>Ryan: What they should do in Sri Lanka is to...I think they should create wealth, wealth meaning they should have industries they should...produce more things, manufacture and so on...If you can create wealth there'll be less friction, there'll be more to go around...and if everyone takes part in that there'll be some progress and we'll have to forget about who's ruling us, who is not ruling us.</p> <p>Nancy: It's a shame that it [the conflict] has got to such an ugly level...it was bordering on genocide in a sense....The world thinks Hinduism is a passive religion but you can see the ugly side ['for the sake of peace you can kill your brother'] when the Jaffna men took up arms and that's what you need to change...and you can only change that through good role models and you don't see that in Sri Lanka, you see that outside [Sri Lanka].</p>

Final question: Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn't?

Sinhalese Focus Group	Tamil Focus Group + Tamil Interviewees
<p>Mike: We didn't discuss...[the] negative publicity that is given by western governments, including Australia, Canada, UK, about protests that have happened in the last 30 years...blaming the Sinhalese people...But nobody's talking about how Tamil people were saved by the Sinhalese people, thousands and thousands...the publicity's always against the Sinhalese people, government, army...</p> <p>Tom: Those journalists are coming from those countries [US, UK, Australia, Norway] where the Tamil population is concentrated, you don't hear [this talk] from anywhere else. I think that [has] got to be corrected.</p> <p>Sam: When I came today I expected to have participation from all the communities. I'm a bit disappointed that..we didn't have that.</p>	<p>Chris: I thought you were going to say [or ask] something [about the various political descriptors that we received in the original mail out for participating in the focus group].</p> <p>Dave: I find...[that] Tamils or Sinhalese, or even the Tamils [themselves] in Sri Lanka they don't want to make a single political comment [to me]. They are very, very scared because they don't know who I am. They might think... 'oh, he may be a Sri Lankan spy'...I found always they are not openly talking [about] their problem or their politics, their situation.</p> <p>Chris: People are still living in the camps [in the north and east]...it's not much food for people there, they give them...a meal once a day...there's no [proper] medicines.</p> <p>Dave: There's so many things happened but they [the perpetrators] have not been punished...How can we reconcile with those people still there? So if they had been punished...then we can reunite, we can move [on].</p>
	<p>Rich: [History of suffering leading to protest leading to inaction leading to taking up arms leading to terrorist label leading to banning and ultimately destruction]</p> <p>Ryan: [Occupation and oppression of a people can lead to terrorism] What we should do is basically have a war on oppression, remove the cause of terrorism.</p> <p>Nancy: Well, we all know what happened, we know why it happened</p>

	<p>and if the brainpower and the capabilities have left the country and are leaving the country, who's left to improve it?...We might sit here in this reconciliation committee or whoever they're here, it's all conversations and how will you implement it many miles away, not knowing the undercurrents of what's going on in Jaffna...because terrorists and insurgents it never dies, it's dormant to surface somewhere later...So, I might have good intentions but I daresay I'm not going back there [Sri Lanka] to change the world.</p>
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Appendix 2

SLRF – Mixed Focus Group

Opening question: What is your pseudonym, and what year were you last in Sri Lanka?

Rich (Tamil): My name's Richard. I...visited [Sri Lanka in] 2004.

Nancy (Tamil): I'm Nancy...The last time I went back [to Sri Lanka] was about 14 years ago [1999].

Ryan (Tamil): My name is Ryan...I was last in Sri Lanka...in December 2010.

Tom (Sinhalese): I'm Tom. My last year in Sri Lanka was December 2010.

Sue (Sinhalese): I'm Sue. I was in Sri Lanka the last week of December last year [2012].

Sam (Sinhalese): I'm Sam. I was in Sri Lanka in August last year [2012].

Introduction question: What does a healthy multicultural society look like?

Ryan: When about two or more people or races get together peacefully and have tolerance towards each other and [are] fair to each other. And also that everyone gets an equal opportunity in whatever and everything, in jobs, in education, in all the other things society can provide.

Rich: I agree with (Ryan) but also in a multicultural society...any group or each group can preserve the identity and...come out to help their culture, maintain their culture, but at the same time be part of the country as a core people.

Tom: To me a healthy multicultural society is a bit like living in a street with neighbours. We know each neighbour is different in doing their day-to-day stuff and...as long as people in the multicultural society don't have a burden of thinking 'who is that person and who am I', I think that's a very healthy multicultural society. You just naively get on with everyone else without even having to feel or think that 'I

am me, that's him, that's him, that's different'. That's not healthy to me. Healthy means you don't even know or you don't care, you just get on with your work, you talk to each other, no-one is putting their finger to other works.

Nancy: Today in the 21st Century, we're all living in a global world...I think multiculturalism is passé. We're all...just transient individuals, we live one day in Dubai, the next day in Singapore. So I think it needs a little bit of a rethink what multiculturalism really means. Are we talking about multiculturalism [in the sense of] just people co-existing...in harmony, or are we trying to say talk about one society [and] say they're more superior to the other? Those are the little nuances that come into it when you talk about multiculturalism. To me we are global citizens.

Sue: I think multiculturalism is slightly different to multi-ethnicism which is what I think today's Australia is about. It's like...there are five different fingers, but it's one hand. So while we maintain our ethnicity and our cultural practices, linguistic practices, we should also maintain a common identity as Australians or Sri Lankans or whatever that we are part of on a global scale.

Sam: My view of multiculturalism is co-existing with other cultures and respecting and appreciating the variety that is...and make use of it for the good of the society. And tolerating different views and different opinions which allows people to live in harmony.

Transition question: How would you describe multiculturalism in contemporary Sri Lanka? [Not asked because Introduction question was time-consuming]

Key questions:

1. How do you feel about the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka? And in NSW, for that matter?

Ryan: I read somewhere [in the Sri Lankan press] that they want to have all three languages, English, Sinhalese and Tamil so that we can all communicate with each other...in...[the same] language. That would be a good thing, that's a good step in the right direction. That'll help...everyone....By saying Sinhalese only...back in [19]58 or [19]56...it denied the opportunity for Sinhalese and Tamils to mix....It was language that separated us and now...we had English before, had we carried on with English we would not have had all these problems.

Rich: My personal opinion is there's no reconciliation happening either in Sri Lanka or here [in NSW]...Some people might be trying, I'm not sure about that, but...we are not at all moving together, rather we are moving separate...still we are moving away from each other.

Nancy: I don't think so...it isn't [the case] where I am coming from [New South Wales]...There's no need for reconciliation [in NSW] because we are living in harmony here.

Sue: If you think about New South Wales, we all speak English, so if language is a barrier, then we can't say language is a barrier here because we all speak English. But...I don't think there's true harmony between the two communities. We are still separate. We come together at Independence Day. Like tonight, there'll be Tamil people, there'll be Sinhalese, Muslims, everybody. But I think there's this unspoken code there, 'oh, you're separate, I'm separate'. We are all distant...

Tom: We are not openly fighting each other here, but there is a bit of fire underneath the ashes sort of thing.

Nancy: We like going to certain functions where we have the Tamil people, Sinhalese people, but we are certainly agnostic to that because we are friends from back home or were ex-pats together in Singapore or something like that. So we don't see that there's a tension underlying, but maybe it's a generational thing. I think when I go to my parents' home I can hear conversations [about this] a little bit.

Rich: But have you ever talked about the politics with any of the Sinhalese?...Like what's happening now or before?...So you are avoiding any sort of activity. I mean, you talk politics about other countries...about Russia...America...Afghanistan, why not Sri Lanka? We are from Sri Lanka.

Tom: As soon as you go to a Sri Lanka subject, you are partial...You say I'm Tamil, I'm Sinhalese, I'm Muslim, whatever, so you get your party one side and then talk in favour of that side, that's where the conflicts can happen.

Sam: I think it's all different minority groups within the larger community. Both sides will have extremist views but a percentage of people who's having those strong views I think are going down now...I don't find any Sinhalese groups advocating extremism at this stage, which is a good thing that I find when I go back to Sri Lanka. There's nobody that has spoken about superiority by defeating one party. They are happy to live...forget the past and enjoy the peace...We don't interact and speak about this. In my opinion I'd like to put the past aside and look at the present situation in Sri Lanka which are people who need assistance after a 30 year battle...If we can help those people, that is the biggest thing...That is the need of the world for reconciliation.

Rich: Why if the Sinhalese are [the] majority [and] are really for reconciliation, why are they voting for this government?

Sam: My experience is that when I see people who are not interested in talking about politics or Tamil or Sinhalese, they get on with their lives and they have inter-marriages, they have business partnerships and friendships. So that's one positive thing I see.

Rich: I think that has been there all the time...I don't believe even the war has stopped that actually having kind of marriages or anything. But that doesn't promote a political understanding or reconciliation in Sri Lanka. As I said, [the] majority is still voting for the government because it is completely against reconciliation.

2. What do you think is the greatest impediment to the peace process in Sri Lanka?

Tom: I guess probably the international influence can be a big backwards step in reconciliation of Sri Lanka because they [Americans, British, Canadians] actually renew the wound. They don't let the wound heal....As an example, the Canadian government recently...they always get this human rights issue up connected to the war which finished about three years ago, or four years ago. They get that up and connect to a human rights issue and say 'Okay, we are going to boycott Sri Lanka'...and Americans...and British do the same. These governments are rich and powerful and I think by sending that message out the people who live together in Sri Lanka I think [some of them think] 'Okay, you do this, you go and influence those guys to come and blame us' rather than getting together. I think this create a bit of a 'you and me' sort of split rather than 'us'...That's what I think [is] making the biggest impediment to the reconciliation process.

Ryan: The problem in Sri Lanka is...during the war, the last three months of the war, some 40,000 people got killed...innocent people got killed and that is a war crime, by today's standards that is a war crime. And that's what these guys are talking about, Americans and that. But, as far as Sri Lanka is concerned it's a third world country, [with] third world justice. 40,000 people, so big deal, forget about it, move on. That's what everyone else is saying, 'Okay, let's move on. Forget about 40,000, that's just too bad. They're not our brothers, they're not your brothers or my brothers, they're other people, you know. It happened to others....As long as it's others, it's fine. Only when it comes to our family, your family...

Rich: I think the biggest impediment is I don't believe the Sinhalese politicians are ready to sit down and reconcile...And that's always been the case from the beginning....I mean, [their view is] it's just everything is happy, fine, but that's not the case and we don't live together....The president says everything is fine, we don't have to do anything and this is what it is.

Ryan: It's a democratic government and the majority are Sinhalese and they elect their government. The Tamils don't have a say....The problem really in Sri Lanka now is really an economic problem...we haven't got enough to go around. And what you are doing is you are

shutting out one section of people and saying 'you guys, you stay out, we've got only this much, you stay out'. Maybe if [the economy] is big enough we could share it with everyone.

Sue: At this [focus group] table we can see where there's problems for moving forward because we are holding onto things and we are going into the past and we are saying 'Oh, you did this, therefore we can't [reconcile]...I think if we hold onto these grudges, however small they are, however political/economical they are, there's no moving forward. We need to move forward...We can't just say it's the government's responsibility. Yes, they do have a responsibility, however it's the common people as well. We need to get that going.

Rich: I think I know most Sinhalese see to talk like that: 'Oh, we forget the past, now we have won the war, we forget the past...everything is peace now'. It's not true. You're one side ruling the other. And that's how Tamils see it. And I mean you can't have a reconciliation without having some understanding of the past. There's no way to think this way everything will go away. And, both sides need to be on board. So I mean you have to address the past, you can't hide [it] under the carpet and say... 'we didn't do anything'.

3. Looking at the 'descriptors' for Sinhalese political opinion (on the copy of the original mailout documents), do they seem broadly accurate to you? If not, why not? Is there an important opinion not represented?

Rich: I mean if you look at the first one [Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country. Minorities have no rights as such, they should be grateful for being allowed to live in Sri Lanka], I think that's what it is in reality. That's what I believe at least, that (the majority of) Sinhalese think, the first one...I mean within the heart that's what they're thinking...otherwise we would have a solution a long time ago...We wouldn't have the civil war at all...I mean if they think the bottom one [Minorities in Sri Lanka have suffered significant discrimination and lack of protection. Only significant devolution of power (e.g. Federal states, or separate nation state) can ensure their safety and rights are respected] for example, maybe it would have been solved before. The civil war wouldn't have happened...I'm sure different people have different views here, but my opinion, most Sinhalese have this [first] opinion, that's why we couldn't come to a solution here.

Tom: I think [regarding] the first category [of Sinhalese political opinion], I can hardly imagine a single Sinhalese person has ticked this first box...Very few people might have agreed that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist singular country just like Australia is a Christian, European looking country. But the second sentence [Minorities have no rights as such, they should be grateful for being allowed to live in Sri Lanka], I don't think a single Sinhalese person would agree...what rights [haven't they got] as minority in Sri Lanka...? [Regarding the other options for political opinion in the handout] yes, in different proportions, some people might have [these views].

Sue: I think the majority [of Sinhalese] would agree with [one of these four political descriptors]...I don't think pertaining to the first sentence [option] that this is the case...I think somewhere here [amongst these descriptors] is what the majority of the Sinhalese people feel. We do need to admit there have been some wrongs towards Tamil people and we do agree that they have to be acknowledged...the lessons have to be learnt. But in my opinion I don't think those lessons that we learn should be re-visiting...over and over again.

4. Looking at the 'descriptors' for Tamil political opinion (on the copy of the original mailout documents), do they seem broadly accurate to you? If not, why not? Is there an important opinion not represented?

Rich: Yeah [I can see 90-95% of Tamils being able to locate their views somewhere amongst these four political descriptors].

Ryan: I think it's pretty good [in terms of coverage of political positions amongst the Tamils]

Tom: I guess this is what the Tamil people think here....I mean it may be wrong but I guess all Tamil people still fit into one of these four boxes.

5. What do these descriptors suggest to you, if anything, about the reconciliation process?

Rich: They're quite contradictory, I think....We can't agree on a fact which is what the current situation [is] and then we agree what we do for that to...resolve the situation. If you accept that nothing is wrong then there's nothing to do obviously, which is what I'm saying. Both sides have to say that.

Sam: Like you said, the war is won and the Sinhalese feel that they have won and everything is good. No. The fact that although the war was won, I look at it as a war that was won for both sides, because if you see how many of the Tamil community lost their lives by their own people because of their giving their opinions, including political leaders of the Tamil community...both sides have lost good, valuable political leaders. As a result we have a vacuum and then we are also suffering as Sinhalese with different types of politicians today as against the type of calibre of politicians who were around...But what I say is everything is not right, that's why reconciliation is needed.

Nancy: That's at the local level, fixing the problems of those who have been affected. But at a...political level the leadership calibre...Geneva Convention, people who have knowledge of those kind of things should lead, not people with very insular backward looking views...we don't have that leadership, on both sides.

Sam: [Concerning the Sinhalese uprising in 1972] I think what happened [afterwards] was there was reconciliation. The government gave amnesty to the JVPs and they were brought into the...political [mainstream] and now they are a political party. I still have trouble accepting them as a political party because in my heart I see them as murderers who killed so many innocent people. But that's a fact and we've got to live with. And so that is reconciliation.

Ryan: But right now there are things happening in Sri Lanka...The armed forces there is that of an army of occupation, you know, in a foreign country. They can go in and take a woman and rape and...kill (people) and get away and nothing will happen.

6. Can you sum up what would be the key components necessary for reconciliation in Sri Lanka?

Ryan: To address the problems we...the Tamil community has faced in the past, if there were discrimination against them maybe be more fair to them or to get rid of the discrimination and give them equal opportunity and make them feel part of the society, part of the country...Sinhalese going to the north is a good thing...Remove the problems of the past...which separated the country...bring in say English, Sinhalese and Tamil, if they teach all three languages, the country will probably come together regardless of...just one [majority] people.

Nancy: Identify the key issues, somebody's got to facilitate this...with intelligence, even if it is Geneva or whatever...come in and facilitate this, external intervention mediation because you can see 'never the twain shall meet'. You see here [at the focus group].....so an external mediation, unbiased, intelligent, with no baggage, identify the issues and move forward, three languages, whether that's going to work or not, I mean if Singapore can work, Lee Kuan Yew did it; why can't Sri Lanka do it?

Sue: Singapore is a military [dictatorship?] in disguise.

Tom: I think that [strong single-minded leadership respecting different ethnicities?] is what we need in Sri Lanka.

Ryan: The government of the day will not rely on anyone from outside the country (i.e. external mediation) to come and tell them what to do.

Sam: I think already there's things in place to reconcile [such as] language [policy]...Now already [they've] started to teach Sinhalese [the] Tamil language, and Tamils Sinhalese, and also increasingly the English teaching on a broader scale...But that doesn't happen overnight...the learning of the language, so at least at the lower levels it will start in the younger generations. And the next key...is

economic development....We as individuals I think need to contribute [each] in a small way what we can do and I have decided that I will go out of the way to accommodate the minority community just to heal the wounds, not taking a stance in that 'if they're not doing that, I'm not doing this'. I think there are people doing that from both communities...if we want to live as one nation...if we think that there's no solution but separatism then that's a different situation....We feel that we can still live with the Tamil community together. If they could have intermarriages at the worst time of the fighting, why cannot we live together? That's how I look at it.

Tom: I think the key component necessary is the honesty in both sides. The government's ability to reconcile is limited. They simply can't pass a law tomorrow and say, 'hey, you and these two are reconciled'...that doesn't happen, it's just limited to [words on] a paper. They can pass anti-discrimination laws and stuff but that's about it. But then the community voice, it's us, has the 90% of the responsibility to reconcile. The false propaganda without facts or hurting each other is what's not necessary....If you're honest I can feel it and if I'm honest you can feel it, [and] that's where the reconciliation happens.

Rich: Unless there's a clear political solution, I mean, you can blame the politicians, we aren't going to get a way of having a solution that way, so ultimately politicians, we elect, so if you like it or not, they're the ones that will reach the political solution....You have to accept the Tamils as a distinct community, I mean you can't say they're Sri Lankan, we are fine. No that doesn't work anymore because it didn't work....So reconciliation you have to accept that Tamils...have lived in north and east, so you have to give some sort of...a constitutional thing. I mean for Tamils there's no way without that. So when they have a solution and both sides agree and you sign an agreement and there you can start from that, we can maybe forget the past. I mean, obviously something has to be addressed about the past....there has to be some commissioner or some investigator [not Sinhalese, not Tamil, but international intervention]...so somebody has to do that and find these culprits [who have committed human rights abuses and war crimes?]. So that has to be done, and then we have to have an agreement, then from there we can say 'forget the past' and we can continue with the future...Otherwise, the general talk doesn't work.

Sue: I think there are three folds [components/steps?] here. First, we have to acknowledge the past....I don't think it's just the Tamil people who got disadvantaged during this whole time including the war, it is both Sinhalese as well, we suffered as well as a result. Second...if we were to do an international intervention, it needs to be impartial, it needs to be completely away from somebody influenced by India, somebody influenced by any other country that has hidden agendas, needs to be completely impartial...And the political situation then needs to give rise to the economic freedom and I think some sort of regional autonomy....There has to be some sort of power given to these ethnic communities but there needs to be a lot of coordination because especially the political decisions, economics, as a group they need to come together and work together.

7. Is there an existing model for reconciliation that should be adopted or adapted for Sri Lanka? (e.g. Truth & Reconciliation Commission in South Africa; UN Tribunal in Cambodia)

Nancy: What is the success? So they have intervened, what are the [results] because the proof's in the pudding.

Tom: Without knowing the background [of those interventions, it is hard to judge whether they might work in Sri Lanka]...The problem can be different without knowing the facts, what they suggested in the reconciliation.

Ryan: But they've already had the Reconciliation Commission in Sri Lanka....Are there any recommendations, have they made recommendations which are worthwhile?

Sue: There are. I don't think any one of them have been...acted upon. No, but there have been recommendations, there have been truths agreed.

Rich: I think that the South Africans, I think [that model] is a good one, I think it has worked to some extent...I think the South African Reconciliation Commission has people that come and said what they had done...all these bad things. Some of them were charged later on, some of them were not. I don't know how they process...the legal side of it...I think that sort of thing certainly would work in Sri Lanka just [for] the past. But just for the future, I think somebody has to negotiate because that Commission can't negotiate what is for the future.

Sam: I think from the Sinhalese side, the reason they don't want international mediation is there's ample proof of being biased for the simple reason that unlike in Cambodia or South Africa, there had been the movement of the Tamil organisations, the non-violent side of the organisations, they had influenced the UN and all these agencies for them to be biased towards Sri Lanka...there's a lot of proof for it...Personally for me, the Singapore model, if they can use it is Sri Lanka [would be the best model for reconciliation].

Nancy: I'm looking at capitalism [as a model] that can solve a lot of problems in that if the whole country improves economically, people are happy, you're not bothered about if the Sinhalese person's house is bigger than yours or vice versa.

Ryan: The main problem...in Sri Lanka is democracy [as a model]...we can't give one man one vote, that principle is not good. This is why in Singapore...and the democracy they had which under Lee Kuan Yew was not a total democracy, he actually controlled the place....So because he was able to hang onto power and he did the good things, he did things to develop that place, that's why the country's so

powerful, so rich and we are poor because we speed up democracy and every five years we voted somebody else....If you get the same vote whether you are a professional or whether you are someone who has no means, who has no education [but] the same vote, there are more people who are at that [poor] end than people who are with their education....Then the government...[could] bribe the poor people who in the country are the majority and that's how they got into power....There was no progress, and democracy actually went against...well, helped...to keep us down. I felt that when I was younger, I felt the British had left us a system which will keep us in poverty in perpetuity...and that's happening.

8. What is your view on Sri Lankan asylum seekers coming to Australia?

Rich: [Regarding boat people] I can't put a real number on it, but 80% probably they are coming for economic reasons...20% or 10% or whatever the number...will be the real ones [i.e. genuine refugees].

Sue: I work with boat people...[the] majority [of boat people] come from [areas] which is the Sinhalese majority....They're [leaving] mainly for economic reasons....They are coming here looking for better jobs, better prospects, I don't think they're refugees in the true sense....I don't think anyone's at the moment facing political persecution as they did before, I'm sure there are some there but I don't [think] there are as many as before....When we talk about the boat people...I don't think the majority actually do come here because of (political persecution).

Tom: Political asylum is needed for political security, while political security goes with personal security because they say...they're trying to take physical revenge on me because I was...working for that party or this party, or that group or this group. If they're say, ethnically insecure they don't necessarily have to go to Australia or Canada which are the most popular destinations at the moment. So they're going past dozens of countries to go to those two countries, which shows that it's not really security because...Tamil Nadu used to be the most secure place for them which is 20, 30 kilometres away from Sri Lanka.

Rich: [Tamil] people are now reluctant to go to India because you're trapped there (without citizen's rights or internal documents), there's no future, you don't know what is the future.

Ryan: I think the Australian government has given the Sri Lankan government resources to keep people who want to leave the country in. I mean...there are some people...who probably want to get out and they are being held back by the Sri Lankan navy or whoever...That's a bit sad, I think. If somebody wanted to leave the country they should be allowed to leave.

Sue: They should be allowed to leave [but]...they have to go through the legal process.

Rich: But...there is persecution and if they want to get out of the country, they can only get out of the country illegally. I mean, they cannot go to...get a ...passport. I mean if you are persecuted then are you going to get a passport from the government?....Can they go to the airport and get on...you have to leave illegally.

Ending question: Suppose you had one minute to speak privately with (Prime minister) Julia Gillard about reconciliation in Sri Lanka. What would you say?

Tom: I would say please teach the Australian model to [the] Sri Lankan government because [the] Australian government...without mentioning the word 'reconciliation' or 'governance' is working perfectly to my understanding. There are so many other different variety of minorities living in this country. Sinhalese is...one, Tamil, Chinese, Italian, so many of them...but they all have accepted the fact they are minorities specifically....If you don't agree to be an Australian, she recently said, you may leave to [go to] another country where you like, but she said you have to accept this is Australia if you want to live in this country. That's a very good leadership stand regardless of ethnicity. As an example in Sri Lanka, if the Tamil population is 85% I would be the first one to stand up and...say we all need to learn Tamil because that's the majority, we have to accept the reality.

Rich: [Julia Gillard] should ask the Sri Lankan government to implement what they have said (about reconciliation, autonomy, etc.)...If they [don't] agree, Julia Gillard [should] have nothing to do with them any longer.

Sue: I think Julia Gillard should convince the rest of the world, Britain, Canada, America [to] mind your own business. Let Sri Lanka mind their own business, let them do what they have to do to get on with what they have to do because their identity is different to these 'nowhere' people. Indians, British, they're...giving money but with conditions, there's strings attached. They need to take them away, they need all these NGOs funded by them to be taken out of the country, they need all that influences taken away. So, Julia Gillard needs to...convince the world to get out of the country.

Ryan: I would like the ...Sri Lankan government to remove the armed forces, I mean they can maintain security but there are too many people, too many armed forces in Jaffna, in the north, and every 100 yards there's somebody and...the more soldiers you have, the more incidents of misconduct, rape and so on, like any occupying army...Give the opportunity for the Tamils to progress and...create opportunities for Tamils so that their grievances are addressed. And then the forcible planting of people in the north and the east, and not from the south which they should restrain....[This] causes problems in communities and the people who have been living in certain areas

are being swamped with people from another place and they don't seem to have the same freedom they had before....If people move freely [of their own accord] that's fine, but if people are taken and put in a place that is not done freely and it may affect the people who are living those areas, [then I am opposed to that].

Nancy: I'm not for living separately [in] federal...state because I think survival of the fittest. If you're clever, you're intelligent, you can integrate and you will...be given equal jobs, equal opportunities in the Sinhalese mainstream. We've had generations who did this, so you don't have to divide and live in your little ghetto to succeed, and Australia has proven that. She's breaking down barriers...We've done it, we are part of the mainstream. If we are given the opportunity, why can't we do it in Sri Lanka? I'd love to see that happen, and if Julia Gillard can do that for us...

Sam: I would ask [Julia Gillard] to invest in developing the underdeveloped areas by their funding for translation of the language issues in the government departments to provide translators and also provide training colleges in a big scale so that the people in the north and the east can be skilled to be able to move to anywhere in the country and work.

Final question: Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn't? [Not asked since discussion was already far reaching, and all participants were making their second appearance as contributors]

☞ End of Report ☞