



Sri Lanka Reconciliation Forum – Sydney

The end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka: A day of remembrance for all those who died during the conflict

The 30 year armed conflict in Sri Lanka, which ended on the 19th of May 2009 means different things to different people.

Successive governments saw it as defending the sovereignty of the nation, protecting its territory and maintaining the unitary nature of the state. They saw the final brutal stages of the conflict as a necessary step in ending the three-decade long separatist war waged by a group of armed dissidents who lacked legitimacy.

While others saw it as a freedom struggle and an attempt to establish a separate state in the part of the country, which they believed was their traditional homeland. They saw the ruthless armed campaign against the state as a natural outcome arising out of the failure of all attempts to find a peaceful and negotiated settlement to the underlying political issue.

Moderate observers could see a level of truth in both these positions. However the recent history of Sri Lanka has shown that the use of violence - by the state or by liberation movements - has hardly led to anything constructive. Political violence hurt the very people on whose behalf it was waged, and only ended up worsening the situation and adding more layers to the original problem.

Violence kills people. Regardless of whether person killed is called a terrorist, a hero, a combatant, or a civilian, it is a life lost, which cannot be retrieved. Each human being killed would have been a son or daughter, brother or sister, a husband or wife, a grandfather or a grand other. Someone, if not many, would have grieved at the death of each human being killed, during the three decades of war.

Now that the period of armed conflict is over and the nation is striving to unite and move towards peace and reconciliation, reconstruction and rebuilding, and a resumption of normal life as much as it is possible despite the grieving over loss of life, it is necessary for the nation to remember the dead, mourn and pay respects to each and every one who lost their lives as a result of the war:

We mourn all civilians killed, regardless of whether they got caught in the cross-fire, or they were deliberately targeted.

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We mourn all combatants killed, regardless of which side they were on. We do this in a humanitarian frame of mind without attaching any labels to those killed, in an act of compassion to those who died and their loved ones who are grieving. We are not exonerating or judging anyone's actions, but just recognizing the humanity in all.

We mourn all those who were killed in the line of duty; journalists, aid-workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, transport workers, public servants, priests and numerous others who heeded the call of duty even in the most extremely dangerous conditions.

In the spirit of reconciliation and with the hope that political issues henceforth will be resolved without recourse to violence, the Sri Lanka Reconciliation Forum invites those of Sri Lankan origin living in Australia and well wishers to remember **all** those who died in the war in Sri Lanka, in a religious or civil ceremony during this period by observing two minute silence.

We also urge places of religious worship to make a special reference to those who died and invoke blessings on them during the normal religious programs conducted by the place of worship during this period and observe two minutes silence in remembering those who died.

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