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**ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA:
OBSTACLES TO THE PEACE PROCESS**

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Abstract

The complexity and magnitude of the Sri Lankan conflict have grown over the last five decades, making it one of the most protracted and devastating conflicts in the world today. With the prolongation of conflict, the chances for establishing peace have become distant, the gap between the two communities has widened, and new elements have been introduced to the conflict.

The impediments to the establishment of lasting peace on the island encompass both domestic and external factors. Among the large variety of such factors, this study has focused on but a few. The analysis of the domestic factors dwells on the nature of the existing political structure, the characteristics of devolution, and the sources of violence. The examination of the external factors addresses the significance of geopolitics, the role of the Sri Lankan diaspora and the role of the international community.

The exploration of the failure of the peace process in the island points to a combination of internal and external factors that impede the establishment of a liberal democratic political structure. Despite its reputation as a Third World democracy, the Sri Lankan polity has, since independence, increasingly developed into an illiberal democracy. Although possessing nominal features of a democracy, the Sri Lankan political system is saturated with highly undemocratic elements. Amongst these elements, the ethnocisation of the society, confrontational politics and violence are specifically addressed by this study. Moreover, this study contends that the deepening ethnic crisis is a direct result of the failure of outside actors to promote democracy in the island. Having been a victim of the Cold War neglect, Sri Lanka's continued isolation in the post Cold War era is largely due to its geopolitical position. Finally, the study identifies the contemporary role of diaspora communities as a severe hindrance to a lasting peace in the country. Apart from material contributions, the divided diaspora communities are a major source of illiberality, and this reflects upon the peace process in various ways.

Thus the analysis concludes that lasting peace in the island is possible only through the promotion of genuine liberal democracy, both within and from the outside. Now more than ever before, the new realities of the post-Cold War era provide an atmosphere conducive to such a process.

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To Evachka and Vladinka

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Abbreviations

ACFOA	Australian Council for Overseas Aid
ACTC	All Ceylon Tamil Congress
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
APC	All Party Conference
BJP	Bharatiya Janatha Party
CNC	Ceylon National Congress
CPSL	Communist Party of Sri Lanka
CTL	Ceylon Tamil League
CWC	Ceylon Workers Congress
DDC	District Development Council
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DPA	District Political Authority
DUNF	Democratic United National Front
ENDLF	Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front
EPRLF	Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
ETA	Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Separatist Movement)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigations
FP	Federal Party
FPSL	Friends for Peace in Sri Lanka
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
IRA	Irish Republican Army
JVP	Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front)
JSS	Jathika Sevaka Samgamaya (National Workers Union)
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Lanka Socialist Party)
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (Peoples United Front)
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NLSSP	Nava Lanka Sama Samaja Party (New Lanka Socialist Party)

NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NMAT	National Movement Against Terrorism
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PA	People's Alliance
PDFLP	Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
PLOTE	Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SLA	Sri Lanka Army
SLCP	Sri Lankan Communist Party
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lankan Muslim Congress
SLPP	Sri Lanka Peace Project
SPUR	Society for Peace Unity and Human Rights
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TTH	Tamil Traditional Homelands
TUF	Tamil United Front
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UF	United Front
ULF	United Left Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Commission
UNP	United National Party
USLA	United Sri Lanka Association (New Zealand)
UTHR	University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)