

## (Re)Visiting Sri Lanka

The lengthy civil war in Sri Lanka ended almost two years ago. Nonetheless, many of those who know Sri Lanka well acknowledge that the tensions remain palpable just below the surface of calm that has returned to many parts of that island nation.

The original inspiration for The Mosaic Institute's "Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka" came from two young University of Toronto students, one Tamil and the other Sinhalese. These young women came seeking our help in designing a forum where they and their colleagues could put aside their ethnic differences and find ways of uniting as Canadians with a common interest in bettering the future of the lives of the people of Sri Lanka. One of their goals, which soon became one of ours, was to begin to look at the full picture of Sri Lanka, rather than continuing to view it only through the fractured lenses of their own ethnocultural communities.

There are an estimated 200,000 Tamils living in the Greater Toronto Area alone, and we are increasingly convinced that the vast majority of them do not agree with the methods once employed by the Tigers to pursue their dream of an independent Tamil homeland, or Tamil Eelam. At the same time, many in the much smaller Sinhalese diaspora in Canada – whose counterparts in Sri Lanka comprise the majority of the country's population – recognize that to achieve real peace in Sri Lanka, minority rights benefiting Tamils, Muslims and others will need to be fully enshrined in the country's laws and institutions.

The series has accomplished bringing together student and community leaders of a variety of different ethnocultural and linguistic backgrounds to confront old stereotypes and mythologies,

and to encourage them to listen together to the insights of some of the world's most respected experts on postwar Sri Lanka, as well as each other's narratives.

The young members of our organizing committee, as part of this initiative, spent an evening with Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Canada, Mrs. Chitranganee Wagiswara, and the new Sri Lankan Consul-General in Toronto, Mr. Karunarathna Paranawithana, when they and representatives of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade visited the Mosaic Institute in December of last year. The High Commissioner and the Consul-General had an opportunity to hear directly from young leaders representing all corners of the broader Sri Lankan diaspora in Canada. These young Canadians were extremely effective at articulating their complex relationship to their "other" homeland. They learned that the High Commissioner sees her principal role to be improving relations between Canada and Sri Lanka, where the past support of the Tamil Tigers by certain members of the Tamil diaspora in Canada continues to affect the way in which Canada and Canadians are seen by the Sri Lankan government.

On a trip to Sri Lanka in February of this year, my wife and I were impressed with the orderliness of the country. While we did not have the opportunity to visit the north or the east of the country, from the visits and meetings we held with local business and civic leaders in and around Colombo, it became apparent to us that the current government is very popular among the business class as the economy is on the rise and inbound foreign investment is increasing. But the government enjoys decidedly less popularity among academics, the media and other "civil society" lead-

ers. The media remains under the tight control of the government, and the face of President Rajapaksa graces the front page of every newspaper every day.

A visit with Canada's High Commissioner in Colombo, Bruce Levy, confirmed that his preoccupation, like that of High Commissioner Wagiswara, is on improving bilateral relations between Canada and Sri Lanka, which, for the time being, continue to be challenging.

So where does that leave us? Well, we are hopeful that by building bridges among the Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim Sri Lankan communities here in Canada, we are helping to contribute to a different future for bilateral relations between our two countries.

As we help to strengthen communication between the emerging leadership of the Sri Lankan diaspora and the Government of Canada, as we encourage our "peace dialogue" participants as they raise money to support a development project in Sri Lanka, and as we explore re-mounting our "peace dialogue" in Sri Lanka itself, we are optimistic that one important side-benefit will be an increase in the trust that the current government in Colombo has for Canada, its citizens and its institutions.



Vahan Kololian  
Chairman,  
The Mosaic Institute

[www.mosaicinstitute.ca](http://www.mosaicinstitute.ca)

2 Bloor Street West  
Suite 3400  
Toronto ON M4W 3E2  
CANADA  
Phone: 416.644.6000  
Fax: 416.644.6001  
E-mail:  
[info@mosaicinstitute.ca](mailto:info@mosaicinstitute.ca)  
Charitable # 85627-9617 RR0001

### Chairman

**Vahan Kololian**

### Executive Director

**John Monahan**

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Dr. Jehan Perera at the opening session of "Young Canadians Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka" on September 8, 2010

He urged his readers to expand their understanding of the Sri Lankan diaspora living in Canada, and to view them as a diverse group of people who, despite their differences, are united in their dedication to achieving peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Mosaic's Executive Director John Monahan is grateful for what all the attention has meant for the project:

*"We have been delighted with the profile that this dialogue has had both within the Sri Lankan diaspora here in Toronto, and in Sri Lanka itself. In post-war Sri Lanka, and those living in Canada and elsewhere. The kind of attention that we have generated in the media through the respected voices of people like Dr. Perera and Nigel Nugawela helps to break down the walls of preconception and misconception that can often prevent otherwise well-intentioned people from coming together to pursue their common interest in achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation."*

### Mosaic Institute: What We Do

The Mosaic Institute is an action-oriented think tank that harnesses the connections, knowledge and resources of Canada's ethnocultural communities to advance Canadian solutions and promote peace and development in conflict-ridden or under-developed parts of the world.

# THE MOSAIC DISPATCH

HARNESSING CANADA'S DIVERSITY FOR  
PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT ABROAD

## Mosaic's Work on Sri Lanka Gathers Attention

The Mosaic Institute's "Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka", which the Institute has presented since September 2010 in partnership with the Trudeau Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies, has been a great success. The project has brought together more than 75 young Canadians of Sri Lankan descent, including those from Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim backgrounds, to discuss their common interest in the emergence of a more peaceful, inclusive, and democratic Sri Lanka.

The dialogue series is set to conclude on March 14, 2011 with a visit from Canada's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Bruce Levy, and a group conversation facilitated by Dr. Julie Mehta of the University of Toronto.

The Young Canadians' Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka has received a lot of positive attention both in Canada and in Sri Lanka. Broadcasts of the various dialogue sessions (available on the websites of both the Mosaic Institute and the Munk School) have been viewed almost 8000 times. Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs—both in Ottawa and at the High Commission in Colombo - has been extremely supportive and encouraging from the outset, and the Dialogue's organizing committee had the opportunity to discuss their work at length with Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Canada and Consul-General to Toronto in December 2010.

Panelists have also been very helpful in spreading awareness about the Dialogue. Nigel Nugawela, from the October session on "The Role of the Media and the Future of Sri Lanka", has provided links to broadcasts of large-group sessions on the Groundviews website, which he is the co-editor of. Dr. Jehan Perera of Sri Lanka's National Peace Council (pictured left), a panelist from last September's session entitled "What's Next for Sri Lanka?", wrote an op-ed in the New Year's edition of the Sri Lankan Guardian newspaper in which he recounted his participation in the Dialogue. In an article entitled "Make Peace with Tamil Diaspora in New Year", he noted that he was very impressed by how peacefully and constructively Tamil, Sinhalese, and Muslim youth involved in the Dialogue had discussed the future of Sri Lanka.

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## “South Sudan” Votes for Secession

In a historic referendum in January 2011, the people of South Sudan overwhelmingly voted for secession. It was an enormously important moment for the Sudanese, including members of the Sudanese diaspora living in Canada. Canadians originally from South Sudan were able to participate in the referendum through voting centres set up in Toronto and Calgary, and all members of the broader Sudanese community kept careful watch on the results as they were announced.

The Mosaic Institute has worked to enhance Canada’s role in bringing peace to Sudan. In 2009, Mosaic completed a research report for the Sudan Task Force of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Having found the “Smart Map” report an important tool in its work, the Sudan Task Force invited Mosaic to host a national foreign policy conference on Sudan. Mosaic brought together community leaders from across Canada, as well as DFAIT and CIDA officials, to discuss Canada’s policies toward Sudan in the lead-up to the 2011 referendum.

Building on connections made at the conference, some participants subsequently drafted a collective appeal for peaceful referenda to be held in southern Sudan and the Abyei region, and for popular consultations to be held with the people of both the Nuba Mountain and South Blue Nile regions. The letter was submitted to Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Lawrence Cannon.

Canada has an important role to play in strengthening the world’s soon-to-be-newest state and assisting with a peaceful secession, which will formally take place on July 9, 2011. The expertise and input of Sudanese-Canadians will continue to be an important resource from which the Government of Canada can draw in developing constructive policies to help bring peace and development to the entire region. Moreover, Sudanese-Canadians of all backgrounds set a strong example for their counterparts still living in Africa when they came together to emphasize their shared commitment to the resolution of differences through strictly peaceful and democratic means. These Canadians, who embody the spirit of pluralism and peaceful “good government” for which Canada is known around the world, can play a significant role in helping to ensure that the transition from one state to two is a smooth one.

# MOSAIC AT WORK

## SUCCESSFUL DEBUT OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP PROJECT IN PEEL

On February 18, the Mosaic Institute launched its “South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project in Peel” in cooperation with the Peel District School Board (PDSB). The initiative is made possible by the generous financial support of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the RBC Foundation.

Through a variety of methods, including school-based modules, inter-community dialogues, guest speakers and workshops, more than **200 young people** will be encouraged over the next four months to consider what it means to be a Canadian of South Asian background, to resolve inter-personal and inter-community conflicts constructively, and to become more engaged global citizens on Canada’s behalf. Beyond participating in lectures and workshops, students will also be encouraged to become involved in a variety of community service projects that will reflect the project’s emphasis on constructive “global citizenship”.

The second session which took place on March 2, 2011, entitled “**Canadian Approaches to Addressing Conflict**”, brought almost 250 young people together to discuss prevailing conflicts in South Asia and ways in which Canadians can draw from a shared commitment to strong democratic principles to engage and manage dissent and conflict in their midst. The next session of the “South Asian-Canadian Global Citizenship Project in Peel” will be held on April 19, 2011, and the day’s topic will be “**Investing in South Asian Communities**”.



Student participants at the March 2 session “Canadian Approaches to Addressing Conflict”

Poleen Grewal of the Peel District School Board said: “We are delighted to be the first school board to work with The Mosaic Institute on this important initiative. The Peel District School Board recognizes and values the heritage of all our students. The South Asian Canadian Global Citizenship Project provides our students with the opportunity to articulate what it means to be Canadian and South Asian. It’s also a way for students to embrace their heritage while using their privileged positions as Canadian citizens to address and take an active role in peacebuilding, both locally and abroad.”

## RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE AT UofMOSAIC CAMPUSES

In its first year of operation, the UofMosaic Initiative has taken big strides towards establishing itself as a peacebuilding force on Canadian university campuses. We have UofMosaic student leaders at the three main Toronto schools – Ryerson, York and University of Toronto – and we have discussed expansion with students and officers at McGill University, Dalhousie University, UBC and others.



Dalhousie University

At the University of Toronto, where the first chapter was established, student leaders are in the final stages of a sustained dialogue program entitled the Indian-Pakistani Dialogue for Peace @ UofT. The program has brought students from the Indo- and Pakistani-Canadian communities at the university together at forums throughout the year to jointly map the political, social, and economic contours of the conflict between those two countries. The most recent session was entitled “Thinking Sustainability: Development for Peace and Prosperity in South Asia”. UofMosaic Toronto was thrilled to host two senior development practitioners as guest speakers: Dr. Tanjina Mirza, Vice-President of International Programs for Plan Canada (pictured right), and Mona ElSayeh, Executive Director of the International Development and Relief Fund.



Dr. Tanjina Mirza, Vice-President of International Programs for Plan Canada, spoke at the UofMosaic chapter at the University of Toronto

In addition to dialogue programming, UofMosaic is working with students to produce original research on campus ethnocultural relations. In partnership with student leaders at Trinity College, we founded the Mosaic Working Group – a team of undergraduate students who will conduct interviews and administer surveys to answer the research question: “Does a diverse campus facilitate interethnic dialogue, or foster ethnic fragmentation?” This is a model we hope to replicate, and UofMosaic leaders at York University are already preparing a research project that will inform their planning for next year.

## SUMMER INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE MOSAIC INSTITUTE

With the summer fast approaching, the Mosaic Institute is looking for keen summer interns who have a demonstrated interest in peacebuilding and policymaking. This is an excellent opportunity to obtain practical experience working in a not-for-profit environment. Here are some insights from some of our former and current interns regarding their experience at Mosaic:

“Interning at the Mosaic Institute was a fantastic opportunity to gain exposure to the public policy world. I was able to participate in different initiatives and felt like a valued member of the Mosaic Institute team. I highly recommend the experience to anyone looking for an engaging and exciting experience in public policy.” – *Maya Fernandez, Summer Intern 2009*

“While at the Institute, I provided input on project selection and fundraising strategies. My time at Mosaic helped me to understand the administrative and analytical challenges of approaching peacebuilding from a new perspective.” - *Andrew Sharp, Intern 2009-2010*

“Non-profits such as the Mosaic Institute are now at the forefront of civic engagement and peacebuilding in Canada and abroad, so this internship has been an excellent experience in learning how these organizations operate day-to-day and make the difference that they do.” - *Jennifer Boyczuk, Intern 2009-Present*

If you are interested in an internship opportunity at the Mosaic Institute, please contact us at [info@mosaicinstitute.ca](mailto:info@mosaicinstitute.ca).



Former Mosaic Institute interns Maya Fernandez and Mike Morden