

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY NORWEGIAN MEDIAN IN THE SRI LANKAN PEACE PROCESS DURING THE PERIOD OF 2001-2006

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Introduction

Third party mediation in situations of human conflict is employed when the conflict is too difficult to be terminated by the conflicting parties' own account while they both want to see it end. In mediation, the parties in a dispute work together with the assistance of the mediator to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution (Goran L, Nordquist and Wallenstein, 1993).

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) requesting for a separate state in the North and East of the island have been engaged in the protracted war since 1983. It is a war that has so far cost more than 70,000 lives and made over 1.2 million people internally displaced. During the last two decades, Sri Lanka has experienced three types of mediatory efforts (big power mediation, national mediation and Norwegian mediation) which were all failed to bring an end to the conflict. Norway has become the second outside country following India to play a third party role in the conflict of Sri Lanka. Norwegian mediation helped to draw a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) Catherine, 2002, DeVotta, 2004) and to hold six rounds of talks between the two conflicting parties in 2001- 2006. Within this process Norway as a mediator has performed a significant role in keeping belligerent away from the hostile activities while facilitating them to find a political solution. In the meantime, Norway had faced a number of obstacles that worked against their performance. As such, the aim of the study is to explore the challenges of Norwegian mediation in the Sri Lankan peace process during the period of 2001-2006.

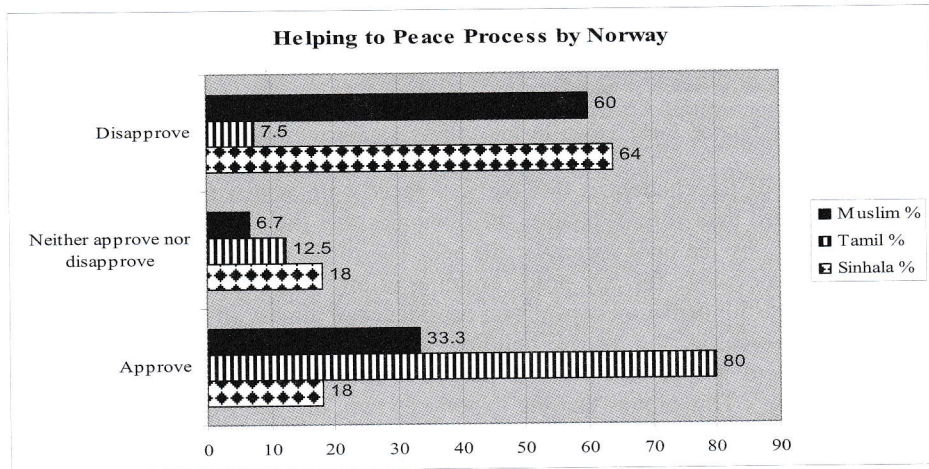
Methodology

The review of literature on the general and Norwegian mediation efforts in Sri Lanka suggested a fundamental question that what are the challenges that Norwegian mediation faced in Sri Lankan peace process during the period of 2001-2006. Based on the question the following hypotheses were formulated in order to find answer to the major question; (1) Successful mediation depends upon the confidence of all most all the influential groups about their voice is being given a space in the peace building process, (2) Norwegian mediation in the peace process is not effective for building peace in Sri Lanka, and (3) Success of a peace process depends upon the effective mechanisms to deal with spoilers. To test these hypotheses, data were collected by open-ended interviews, informal discussions and also texts and other relevant documents. This study is limited to the six selected Districts and focuses only on Norwegian mediated fifth peace process from 2001-2006. Respondents were selected from different districts based on the composition of different ethnic groups that are Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. Out of total 150 respondents, 30 civil society activists and 120 general public were interviewed during the August and September 2006.

Discussion and Conclusion

Most of the analysts agree that neutrality and impartiality are essential matters for perceptions of the parties in the conflict, according to the conceptual analysis and theoretical framework. In general, the people of all communities have given overwhelming support for the peace process. The study indicated that only 42.5% out of 120 respondents agree with Norwegian facilitation to the peace process. Approval is highest amongst the 80% Tamils. The study found that 64% of Sinhalese and 60% of Muslims disagree with Norway's assistance in the peace process. 44.2% out of all respondents said that they won't approve Norway's mediation any more. Out of sample, 13.3% neither approve nor disapprove (See figure 1).

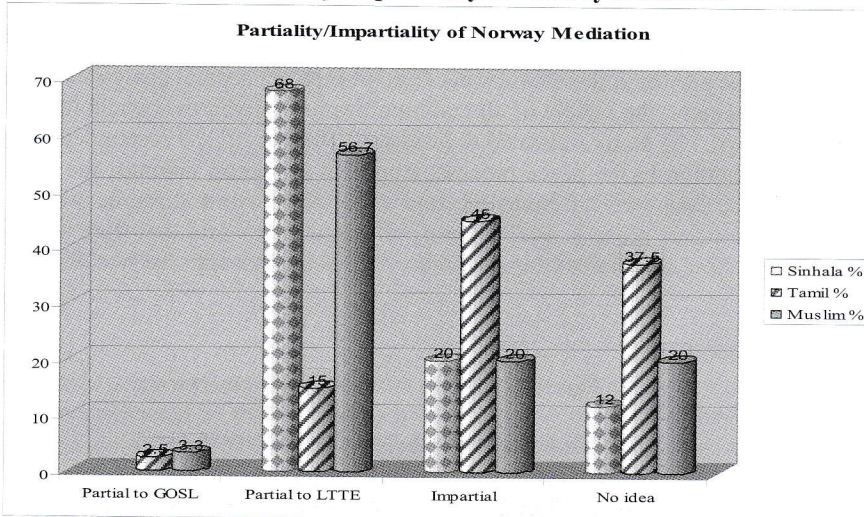
Figure 1: Helping to Peace Process by Norway



Source: Field Survey by the Author, August and September 2006

The finding shows the civil society activist questioned Norway neutrality as a mediator. Majority of civil society activist perceives the Norway as a biased mediator. According to the findings, 47.5% of the public believes that Norway's mediation is partial to the LTTE. Furthermore, majority Sinhalese 68% and Muslims 56.7% believes that the Norway is partial to the LTTE. 45% of Tamils believe that the Norway as an impartial mediator (See figure 2).

Figure 2: Partiality/Impartiality of Norway Mediation



Source: Field Survey by the Author, August and September 2006

Therefore, one of the challenges that Norway faced with is that the lack of civil society consensus toward their role. Whatever the outcomes that the peace process brought, those had to be barred by the civil society at the end. Therefore, the civil society awareness and consensus are inevitable for any peace building effort. This supports the first hypothesis valid that successful mediation depends on confidence of almost all the influential groups in having their voice in the peace building process. The next challenge is that the marginalization of groups and political parties obstructed the peace process and created 'spoiler behavior'. This proves that the hypothesis two, that the Norwegian mediation into the peace process is not effective for building peace in Sri Lanka, to be valid in its general content.

Furthermore, the Norwegian-sponsored peace process is very much a bi-lateral one between the two major actors, the government and the LTTE. The lack of other parties' support generated anxieties and those who felt threatened or excluded from the process tried to use different tactics to spoil whole process. Especially the exclusion of Sinhala and Muslim nationalist parties by keeping shut their say from the peace talks has further fuelled volatile activities across the country. To test the third hypothesis, 'the success of a peace process depends upon effective mechanisms to manage spoilers'; findings support to validate its argument. In addition, the results of analysis presented several challenges including (but not limited to) political insatiability of the country, violation of human rights, ignoring to take Muslim interests into account, obstinacy of the LTTE, and violation of the CFA by both parties. The suggestions of the study highlight the importance of all levels of civil society actors' participation, public awareness, and consensus in the peace process and it can be helpful to avoid the spreading of the mistrust against the facilitators or mediators. In addition, it is important that all segments of political parties, and political leaders from all sides, contribute to a conducive atmosphere for peace process.

It can therefore be concluded that, facilitating civil society participation and effective handling of spoilers in the peace process were very crucial challenges, among others that Norwegian mediation faced in Sri Lanka during the period of 2001-2006, and that ultimately contributed to the derailment of the peace process.

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