

# **CONFLICT AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN SRI LANKA**

*A STUDY OF TWO COMMUNITIES IN THE  
ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT*

by


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## DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

The work described in this thesis was carried out by me under the supervision of, Professor M.M. Karunanayake, Senior Professor of Geography, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka and a report on this has not been submitted in whole or in part to any University for the award of any degree / Diploma.

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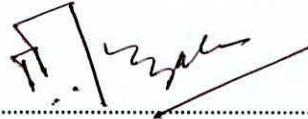


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# **Conflict and Internal Displacement in Sri Lanka**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the present world, displacement of people has become a severe issue which can be analyzed in various dimensions. The internal and international conflicts have played a major role for producing the many thousands of IDPs in the world. In the Sri Lankan context, the main conflict could be considered as the result of much complicated combination of internal and external factors such as ethnicity, culture, ideology, religion, politics, competition for resources, foreign intervention etc. The civil war which has kept worsening almost during the past two decades is a result of the ethnic conflict originating from a combination of all types of the above mentioned factors. It can be basically analyzed under the historical, political and socioeconomic aspects which caused severe problems to the Sri Lankan society. Internal displacement is a complicated process consisting of sub-processes such as displacement, migration, resettlement, relocation etc. and several stages which are integrated into each other. The nature of displacement in Sri Lanka can be identified from different dimension and it resulted to characteristic features and spatial patterns of welfare centres.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Conflict resolution is a crucial social and political issue which is being analyzed from different perspectives by concerned scholars. Most countries in the present world experience conflicts of various magnitude depending on causal factors and severity. In 1993 and 1994 alone, internal conflicts world wide, forced an estimated 10, 000 persons a day to flee their homes and either cross borders or become displaced within their own countries. According to the United Nations most conflicts are rooted in economic disparities and may display ideological, racial or even religious overtones at a latter stage (UNDP 1991). The Sri Lankan, conflict has to be considered as the result of a much complicated combination of factors. Because of the differences arising from factors such as ethnicity, culture, ideology, religion, competition for resources, foreign intervention etc., Sri Lanka experiences various types of ethnic, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental conflicts. It is justifiable to say that the civil war that had kept worsening during the past two decades is a result of the political conflict originating from a combination of all types of the above mentioned factors. It has caused severe problems within the Sri Lankan society and among them the displacement of people is a crucial one. Eventhough at present the displacement of people has ceased as a result of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the United National Front (UNF) government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) the pathetic situation of the internally displaced still persists (Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights 2003). Reflecting on the policies governing the resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), one finds that the problem of internal displacement may present challenges even at the post-conflict stage.



Therefore, it is considered important in the study to focus on the process of internal displacement which has resulted from the conflict.

Displacement is a multidimensional process which covers different social and spatial movements, related to events such as evacuation, forced migration, refugee movement and internal displacement, which have their particular characteristics and patterns. Displacement can be identified as a process or phenomenon that affects a steadily increasing number of people across the world with variable implications at global, regional and local levels. One dimension of the problem is when individuals, communities or ethnic groups have left their home areas voluntarily or involuntarily forced by external circumstances and have been compelled to settle down temporarily or permanently in new areas which may differ in terms of climate, natural resources, social and cultural organization and practices from their familiar environment.

Closely connected to the causes of displacement are the conditions under which people are forced to abandon their homes. A common factor is the element of coercion, although its form and intensity may vary. Some people may have time to prepare for their departure, but others may have to flee suddenly or unexpectedly. Such people often arrive totally empty-handed, exhausted, sick or wounded, traumatized and divided from the rest of their community. On arrival they cannot rely on physical security or find the necessary basis for sustenance, let alone conditions in which they can live in dignity. They may, therefore, be forced into multiple displacement. However, each of the above forms of displacement occur under particular geographical, historical, political and social circumstances due to natural or man made disasters, development projects and armed conflicts. Over 90% of all

displaced persons in the world have fled their places of origin because of armed conflicts which include international and internal wars, political persecutions, violation of human rights and other kinds of political crisis. Therefore displacement has contributed to increase poverty in countries where there are internal conflicts. Displacement does not always take place within national borders. Internal displacement is often the first step in the massive outflow of refugees across international borders, which in turn causes turmoil for neighbours and may trigger political and economic destabilization of an entire region. Although the refugees and internally displaced persons have many common characteristics, they can be recognized in different forms. Persons who cross the national border are recognized as refugees and they are supported and protected by the international community. In contrast persons who remain in their own country are categorized as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The IDPs who form the majority of the uprooted people in the world today were defined for the first time in 1992 by an analytical report of the Secretary General for IDPs. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) defined IDPs as;

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. (UN Doc E/CN.1998)

A precise definition of IDPs does not exist in the present world. There are differences of opinion as to who should be included in this category including the question of when a person becomes or ceases to be internally displaced. Some argue that former



refugees who have returned to their country but are unable to return to their original places of residence can be considered as IDPs. Some question the very usefulness of operational definitions arguing that forced migration, whether cross-border or internal should be dealt with comprehensively (Helle 1997).

Further evidence of the scale of the problem is provided by the United States Commission for Refugees (USCR) in an estimate provided at the end of 1999; the total number of refugees in the world has reached 14 million and an equally vulnerable but more indeterminate group referred to as IDPs, adds another 21 million to the number of people living under harsh conditions of displacement. These two groups alone bring the total number of displaced persons in the world to more than 35 million (USCR 2000). According to the same source, the number of refugees worldwide has increased by 600, 000 in 1999; which is the first significant refugee increase in seven years. Even a more dramatic jump occurred in the number of internally displaced persons, which increased by 04 million in a single year (2000). Considering the global level, approximately 80 percent of the 21 million IDPs and refugees are women and children in 1999. On the other hand one in four in the world is either displaced or a refugee or has a parent or grandparent who belonged to either category. The 3.9 million Palestinian refugees are the largest refugee population in the world today and one in every four of the world's refugees is a Palestinian. Among the world's longest-displaced groups of refugees are the 170, 000 Sahrawis living in refugee camps near Tindouf in south-west Algeria. Africa contributes 40 percent of displaced persons in the world and 60 percent of them are from the four countries: Sudan (4.4 million); Angola (1.8 million or more); Burundi (1.1 million); and Congo-Kinshasa (1 million). Sudan accounts for one of every nine of the worlds uprooted

people. Sudan and Angola have produced more than one-fourth of the world's entire uprooted people. Over 96 countries in the world have produced a significant number of refugees or IDPs or are hosting a significant number of refugees from other countries. However, the global IDP survey (2000) suggests that in 1992 world refugee figures stood at approximately 09 million IDPs. These significant illustrations show the seriousness of the IDP problem, which has resulted in many social and political problems at individual, community, state and global level.

Sri Lanka depicts a simultaneous growth of displaced persons in all categories; labour migration, refugees and IDPs due to armed conflict, natural and man made disasters and development initiatives and militarized violence. In Sri Lanka, the civil war has caused as many as 800, 000 to become displaced from their homes by the end of 2001 (UNHCR 2001). Among them around 175,897 persons were in 348 welfare centres (WCs) in 14 districts maintained by the Commissioner General of Essential Services (CGES) (Table 1.1). Since 1983 another considerable number of displaced persons have fled to India as refugees. By the end of 1999 more than 70, 000 Sri Lankan refugees were living in more than 100 camps in Southern India. An estimated 40, 000 others were living outside camps, mostly in cities across Tamilnadu. Some 200, 000 to 300, 000 Sri Lankans are said to be in Europe and North America either as residents, refugees or asylum seekers. Nearly 200,000 refugees returned from India, at least 66,000 of whom are in camps in South India (Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights 2003).