# Women. Memory. Reconciliation.



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## Background

The Centre for Equality and Justice (CEJ) conducted residential district level community women forums in the North, East, South, North Central and North Western provinces from August to October 2018. The objective of these forums was to provide a space for women, where they could reflect on and remember their past and find positive ways to move forward. Memorialization and its relevance in a reconciliation process, women's memorialization initiatives that can be carried out at local and national levels and the role of women in the reconciliation process were some of the issues raised and reflected upon at these forums.

The community women's forums in selected districts were conducted in Tamil in the Northern, Eastern and North Western provinces. Forums in selected districts in the Southern and North Central provinces were conducted in the Sinhala language. Two consultants were commissioned by CEJ to facilitate the district level community women forums. Viluthu, Muslim Women Development Trust, Puttalam, Sunila Women and Children Development Foundation, Polonnaruwa, and an independent field coordinator from the Hambantota district assisted CEJ in coordinating these forums.

The Tamil and Muslim women from the North and East consisted of those with missing and disappeared family members, female heads of households, including widows and disabled women. The Sinhala women from the North Central province were internally displaced women from the border villages who had been affected by war and women affected by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrections. The women from the South were Sinhala military widows and victims of ethnic violence and JVP insurrections in 1971 and 1988-89. Internally displaced Muslim women participated in the North Western province forum. The forums adopted diverse methods of working with the women to remember their memories. A Timeline exercise, Memory Box Exercise and a Memory Mapping exercise were carried out to bring back memories of the past and where and when certain incidents occurred in the past. These exercises helped women understood their feelings and experiences. They raised the fact that they had forgotten many stories; the bonds and memories they had with people from other ethnic communities in their own villages. They emphasized the importance of memory in order to create opportunities for the younger generation to learn about the past and also to build mutual understanding, trust and promote coexistence amongst communities. A counsellor was present during the forums so that women could access counselling services if the need arose.

CEJ thanks the organizations and activists that assisted in organizing these forums. Vasuki Jeyasankar and Radhika Hettiarachchi for their dedicated work with the women they interacted and worked with at these forums. The empathy they solwed these women is much appreciated. CEJ also thanks Velayudan Chitra for her painstaking hours of work to lay out and create this album of women's memories.

#### Shyamala Gomez

Executive Director Centre for Equality and Justice

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Created by:Velayudan JayachithraCover Photography and Workshop Photography by:Danny Dishon<br/>Harijeyan Ananthamoorthy<br/>Buddhi Dayan<br/>Sajani WickramasingheInner Photography by:Marintha Perera

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For further information please contact:

#### **Centre for Equality and Justice**

325A1, Thimbirigasyaya Road, Colombo 05, Sri Lanka Tel/ Fax: +94 11 2055404, +94 11 2501457 Email: srilanka.cej@gmail.com Website: www.cejsrilanka.org https://www.facebook.com/Centre-for-Equality-and-Justice https://twitter.com/CEJ\_SriLanka https://www.instagram.com/cej\_srilanka/ CEJ wishes to thank the women who participated in the workshops, remembered their past, reflected on their experiences and shared with us their hopes for a future Sri Lanka that has reconciled its people. The album is dedicated to these women who shared their memories.

#### Indelible Memories of war

Stories and a glimpse into their lives.

Women who lost their husbands, those who are traumatized, those who became disabled due to the war. Mothers who lost their children, sisters who lost their brothers, some still painfully wonder if their loved ones are alive. Soldiers, men and women... These stories of people whose lives are entwined with the war should be remembered, lest we forget. They remember their lives through the war, what they want to remember, what they choose to tell us. The pieces, what's left of their lives after the war and what they make of those, they tell us those too.

History, constructed not by privileged historians, but by these ordinary people who have experienced the pain themselves, old stories which led to the war.

They trace their memories for us. These memories are what we take with us to the future, valuable because they can help us remember, so there's no repetition of their pain.

The hurt, the scars, the smiles through their tears, their hopes, their fears, we attempt to capture some of their stories, so we know, so we remember..





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Sri Lanka in conflict, at different moments in time

1956 - Disagreement over the word 'Sri'

- 1971 the first revolt of the JVP
- 1972 Sinhala Muslim riots,
- 1977 Sinhala Tamil riots, Resettled in Salli area after displaced in Kanniya, Trincomalee
- 1982 My father was abducted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and disappeared in Batticaloa, my brother was taken away from the army for interrogation and released after six months.
- 1983 Black July During the July 1983 riots, children were forcly put on a barrel of a petrol and taken out as punishments.
- 1984 Tamil-Muslim riots, I went to see my father, who was detained in Boossa, Between 1984 and1990, I was displaced twice from Mullaitivu to Puttalam.
- 1985 On July 18, 53 people were detained and bombed in a library in Valvettithurai, my uncle was shot and killed by the LTTE in the Marichukkutty area before my very eyes, the Ganadevi Kovil in Manjantoduvai was destoyed.

Meanwhile, destruction of property, torture, killings, assassination of political leaders, civilian displacement, abductions, political revenge, political imprisonment, and fighting between the government and the LTTE intensified.



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1986 – Brother was burnt alive, my son was shot and killed in Muttur, men were taken to Boossa camp and tortured.

Meanwhile, the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities suffered immeasurablysimilarly and differently. Violence was a normal phenomenon in their daily lives.

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1987 - The invitation to the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) by the Government in 1987 only saw an escalation in violence. Many were killed by the Indian peacekeepers, displacement of civilians from Nedunkerny to Vavuniya, the Northern youth particularly suffered arrests, abductions, rape and more. Forcible abduction of school children and youth in white vans in order to swell the ranks in the army. Another incident of sexual abuse and

killing of schoolgirls reported near the C.M

College, Vavuniya.

1988 - My brother was taken by EPRLF and tortured in Mannar, youth tortured and killed, harassment of Nachchikuda villagers by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) Harassment of women, children, youth and the elderly. Brother was abducted by the LTTE in Ilantamottai, Mannar.

# 1989

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1989 - Lon Lon 1989

1989 - Displaced multiple times due to war, LTTE terrorists in Erukkalampitiya, Mannar threatened villagers asking for food. Those that didn't provide food were abducted. Till today, there is no information of the whereabouts of five of them. Uncle was murdered.

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Sri Lanka in conflict, at different moments in time

1990 – During the ethnic conflict, carrying sacks of dried chillies, assuming they were sacks of rice. Destroying the memorial built by the LTTE. Escaping to India as refugees. Air Attacks. The little missing sister who returns home after 3 days. Bombing the bridge in Mannar. Cancelling school because classrooms were occupied by the war displaced. Returning home to Arayampadi in 1990 from Puthukudiruppu after 19 years of displacement and losing two loved ones. The forcible eviction of the Muslim community from the North. The killing of Muslims in Eravur by the LTTE. Someone carries a cat thinking it is a baby girl. LTTE abducts someone's husband. A respected person in the village of Pandirippu mistakenly wears his wife's skirt thinking it is a sarong.

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1991 – Forcible conscription of child soldiers by the LTTE up to 2006. The Attack on Elephant Pass.

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- 2012 Clashes between the Sinhala and Muslim Communities in Colombo in October. The menace of the 'Grease Yaka'.
- 1996 Displaced from Mannar, settled in Government land in Puttalam, threatened by the Sinhala community there.
- 2002 The reopening of A9 enables travel from the Vanni to Jaffna.
- 2003 Witnessing scores of bodies of dead cadres being transported in tractors.
- 2004 The Tsunami causing the death of people. While an Officer travelled on the Harbour Road, a Black Tiger ambushes the vehicle in a suicide attack. Quelling protests by students with tear gas, as they protested the death of a peer who was killed when a truck with soldiers knocked her down.

#### Sri Lanka in conflict, at different moments in time

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2006

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2006 – Attack on a children's orphanage in Vallipuram, Sencholai. The Army abducts my twenty nine year old son from a place named Kodi. 2007-2009 – The displacement of people of Saalam, Mannarthottam, Iluppakadai,

Mulungavil, Kilinochchi, from Vishvamadu to Mullivaikkal, and in 15-5-2009 till Vattuvakal.

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- 2008 An unidentified group abducts my Uncle.
- 2008 2009 Civilians are displaced from the Vanni to Mullivaikkal.
- 2009 May 18, the disappearance of her husband in Vattuvakal. My son lost his life in a conflict between two groups in Pudumathalan. Displacement during the final battle in May, the loss of lives.

2-00 8404 2005 – Family members and a neighbour die in a shoot-out during Vesak. Following a shooting in an Army Camp,

people arrested in a search operation are shot dead. Five students of the University in Trincomalee are gunned down. From 2005 to 2009, it was mandatory for every family to sacrifice at least one member of their family to the LTTE's cause. The students of Tamil Eelam Masjid School are killed by a bomb.

## 2009

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The most violent last stage of war that was waged between the LTTE and the government armed forces came to an end in the month of May 2009, taking a large number of innocent civilian lives with it.

Along with the 30 year civil war, the violence inflicted by the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) in the 1980s also comes to the minds of women.

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Not just that. We also didn't have the freedom of expression. What we went through was worse than the 30-year long conflict. Speaking to families of the military would serve to put our lives in danger. Youth were burned alive on tires. Most of the people who were killed were innocent civilians who had not committed any wrongs. They sent letters to our houses to gather food, our NICs were taken away: this was our experience during that period. Innocent people had to face many such challenges. There was no vehicle movement, in the streets. Couldn't shop for goods. Black flags were raised. Couldn't go to schools. We pray that we don't have to go through something like this ever again.

In the 80s, several catastrophic events took place in many parts of Sri Lanka. Over a thousand youth were murdered and civilian life was destroyed and life was generally unsafe. Seeing hundreds of corpses floating in the river, bodies burning in tires was a day to day sight for us which we can't forget.

In Thumbuthukale, several women were abducted, tortured, brutally raped and murdered. An elderly person from our village said

....my cousin brother was shot dead by the LTTE while he was on military duty in Trincomalee.

... While living in Trincomalee with my husband who was with the military, we had to face indescribable hardships. We cannot forget the harrowing experiences of living in a border village.

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Despite all the hardship I had to go through in my life, because of my conviction, I am now living a peaceful life.

88 නහත බෙරයදි සහෝදරයා හොදා නාරිති Stern was guard ערמי עהי ובי למה הוצבים 2 6 40 23212 & gde using දුන්නැ කිඩුව කින් නත්ත 2,613 කැන්න 613 ක්ෂිණි නුරු පු නම පන්නුවෙ නිවෙනු 20 2200 00 1308 64250 BASS Non neging good 007 6559) 665 680 ස්සලා බට බාඩ ATIBUS" 122 99 மாவு ஆன்

During the insurgency in 1980s, the forces visited my house threatening us asking where our brother was. They waited till he returned and took him away at night. Everyone from our family went to the police that night inquiring about him. One police officer told us, "him?! He is not here. You came to see him??! Look at the ash over there!" the police officer said whilst coming to shoot us.

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In 1988, thieves trespassed into our home and cut my husband. He had to get 12 stiches. The nieghbour who came to our help was also shot and killed. We had an infant during that time. This incident had severely affected us both economically and psychologically.

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#### The deplorable plight of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims in vulnerable border villages.

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A group of unidentified men abducted my husband. He has not returned home till now.

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We spent our life in fear during the LTTE period. Couldnt eat or sleep peacefully. We would knock off our lights, and all of us home would sleep in one room. The most shocking incident to us was the death of my uncle's son during the war who was in the military.

12 houses were attacked by terrorists from which 38 people were killed. Thereafter, men from outside killed 4 innocent civilians and robbed the place. The soldiers attached to the white lotus movement and home guards had 157 T-56 type rifles. These attacks had economical implications which led to displacements, and those who were displaced returned to their homes in 1997.

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When my father went out and checked, those two had already left. But later we learned that they had killed 6 people in Kaduwanwila area around 5 o clock in the evening and those two were from LTTE. It was our good fortune that we did not go out and check. This is how we escaped.

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So that day terrorists visited the pora-weva village around 9 PM while the villagers were fast asleep that night and caused havoc. Some people were eating. Kids were fast asleep. The terrorists who entered the village slaughtered many people. An enranged terrorist walked in to a house, plucked out the baby from a pregnant mother's womb and put the baby in the rotti pan which was on the lit stove.

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I cannot bear the pain of him leaving us. I still have his ring which he left with me saying I am with you.

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Since we live in the border of

a tamil village called sorivila our house was damaged due to

frequent attacks by the LTTE.

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நிற்கு இது தின காற

One day there was a motar attack in the Welikanda village. That night two kids of my aunt stayed with us. When the motar attack started those two kids got really scared. One of them out of fear wanted to be held, squeezed my neck so hard which became swollen and I had to stay in the hospital for two days.

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> In 1989 and 1989 we couldn't attend school or any tuition class. I couldn't walk in the streets. When we witness people being murdered and burnt on the sidewalk we would run back to our homes. When we saw the military we were afraid that we would be arrested. We couldn't study. There shouldn't be lights turned on. There shouldn't be lanterns lit. I cannot forget having to live like that in fear. I won't be able to forget that period of my life.

பஸ் நகிப்பு Bus station



They were victims of violence not only perpetrated by their 'enemie

The Commencement of the War 2007

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We moved to a village called Peminyanvila under the 1972 Mahaweli project. My brothers were actively involved in politics. They were quite famous due to this. We were harassed by the military, our house was set on fire and my brothers were assaulted by the military. So when I heard about this I rushed to *my house.* 

On the way home, I was stopped, threatened and assaulted. Thereafter for safety reasons I stayed at a known persons house. My brother made me stay at a temporary shelter along with other people. When I was there, the military came to the shelter to arrest others who were there. I was raped by the military.

නීත් කාම්යා 62 වෙනතව හොදුර් ව 2107. මේ වැව ගොදර නාරායම. වන කාලෙකටි කපු නොලෙ ගියා එහිදි දිනියා හැන බ දින්වේ 2007. කාදරට පළුළි දෙන්නාද. තුණින් දුවන් ලැබුනා. 23.19 21 23001 Quobon 2600 3212212) おっかっ かえ、あえををうるう、かしをしののったいとう වෙනාවට. 2002 300 දෙන්න කිරි නැහැ මංගාව මාහ 12 82ල ක 22 දීලා ත 23 වේ. මේ වි දි 200 අවු ගොලිසිහිඟා. 30 දෙන්න නිසා වැඩිසියේ 2405 හෙති ක්රී දෙන ක්රීමාන ක්රීමාන

*My husband wouldn't come to* our house, instead he would go to Colombo because he was having an affair with another woman. *He wouldn't give me any money. With two female kids, I at the age* of 19 wanted to commit suicide because of the untold hardship. Due to starvation, illness, disease I couldn't breastfeed, and I had to make porridge to feed my children. After five years I became severely ill, and nearly died. *It was my family who looked* after me. I went to the police twice but they told me to reconcile and go back because of the children.

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*Men try to harras me at my work* place. I am still unmarried. At the work place I was severely harassed by my superior. Due to this mental trauma I had to *quit my job and stay home.* 

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It is hard to find any person who has not been affected by war or any kind of a conflict ....

One can think "what's done is done". But the immeasurable suffering such a war can inflict is inconceivable

Sometimes the grief and suffering caused by war remains like a scar forever. The pain remains like a scar. \* Digigisson yoldin OTHER -இருந்தும் தாங்கிக் கொள்ள படிகிக் கொண்டோட்ட Horno Juggie Bill mieurie Juggie Bill Mieurie Dianonow 2 roi Male. \* MADA OTATURY WITTERING DE BANNE 2000 DE TENDORIE OTALING WITTERING DE DIG BE GALANTS WITTERING DE DIG BE GALANTS \* Int Ju mary marker man கையத்திலமாக அக்கிலிடாதாகள். Alto & D. 19821 Divers Dirigoli Sivon MARON Divers -- 2001 Divers J Noolad no Losses are nothing new for us. Even then we managed to endure that... But your parting burns us like a flame. Separation is a suffering that no one can bear. Memory is a treasure that everyone cherishes and cannot be erased by anyone. Love should not be a mistake.. Love, but not to the extent that it makes you insane.

Nove, but not to the extent of the that has no end. However there is no life that has no end. There is no relationhip without parting. All this is only for a short time. 1990, during the war, many people went missing. Women believe that they were abducted by the LTTE, the militant groups, or by the Army. Women see it as people 'made to disappear' rather than 'disappeared' It is important to ensure the victims of war and the sexually abused receive justice.

இலங்கையில் ODELIEB OUL BUM OLD Something that needs to be established in Sri Lanka Library of Feminism HINIS S.

1990.07.13

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பக்தியால் கூறுக்கு கான் தந்தை கையத்து காட்க்

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were tortured, raped and lost their lives due to war.

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#### The plight of women in war

To forget the painful memories of war, to continue with life, is a difficult task. Many were the new challenges women faced by themselves.

The loved ones they lost, property they once owned, the women had to endure it all. Those painful experiences are beyond expression. Insecurity, militarization, harassment from armed groups, being shunned from society. Discriminated for one's gender and race. Violence against women. The law didn't help them live their lives. But their belief in themselves helped them move on. So they carried their experiences with them as they moved along with time.

2012 Grease devil situation in Puttalam

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அமைதீதல Boompan வியண் மாதிராகளின் 5 mm - 1 Brigmon 1 minigs Monuments - Memories of militant LTTE women

> balang com Gen SG. A shelter at the bus stop, in remembrance of children who died in the war

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The past determines our present. We must recognize the painful past of these women. Recognizing their pain can ensure justice for them, so they can move on. Women who shoulder responsibilities of the family in the absence of their men, face many challenges. Their challenges are particular to their different communities and cultures.

"A lotus-shaped monument with names of women of all ethnic groups that were victims of violence."

EBBIOHODE JU. hair waiting for her husband Trincomalee LOF MOUNI CLADE El B B an an Loogo "Your memory isn't just enshrined in a 800 memorial built in your name. a helpless mother You are our history. Your soul may have left your body, 5 mi OLENDO CLOSED OFWICH But your memory will live A widow of Ears wins with us forever." Totali - A poem written for the 26:26 0 5 dead black tigers. 0 A widow, a helpless mother, a woman who watches her daughter wait for her husband with kunkumam on her forehead and flowers in her hair. 35 wolwing Deno Whis pone Balg Alyu 5 Algi A cordon and search ONE FI فاهده பஸ் தரிப்படம் 30/13mg + 100000 operation by the Army... Bus stand built for Families who are still looking the children that Tamils are arrested. died during the war for their loved ones. 4年5550 2 四市民美男 Apritic MEBBAR Parale. 13 ormes 20080 வன் இறைக்குட்ப தெது SOI Gener unus orais son wary BLBAR Honoria Storm Asimonia. Sigi along OLIMETES OUWN BOSLON Diz alion . Brums Bronser. "They took my daughter in Tricomalee.

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She hasn't returned home yet."

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Daughter, pottu on her

forehead and flowers in her

#### The fires of war may no longer be ablaze, but its embers still glow

2005-Shakthi Fm

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Families of the dead and forcibly disappeared may have something belonging to their loved one that they may want to hold onto as a memory. If there is a possibility for the families who do not have any loved one's belongings to memorialize their loved ones, to create memorials and to pay respect...

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- In detention at the boost of the months since arrest on suspicion, 2008.
  During the last phase of the war in
- During the last phase of the use Nandikadal, hundreds of thousands lost their lives, 2009.
- Shakthi FM attacked with bombs, 2009.
- Two persons are shot dead in Thampalagamam, 2010.
- Arrested for lighting lamps in remembrance of war heroes in Muthur,
- 2014.
- They arrested my brother again, 2017, An unidentified person had been shot dead, 2017.
- Digana attack 2018

Symbols of remembrance Atreeforevery Thememories of ne memissing Alps then Storen big Ou Oluneous goodie 451 - AN Dos an Bon in Alonge Memories of the trauma of war Q







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### Parks and buildings and electronics in remembrance...

While some women have the opportunity, not everyone is enjoying equal rights in our country. Our country lacks respect for a pluralistic society in which others' sufferings and rights are respected.



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AND

"Unafraid to respond to memories of the war that appear on Social Media. To connect with others who share my views and to exchange ideas".

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בנהיוום נישוים

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Some may feel that memorials renew the pain and horrors of war. But the women think these are symbols to remind us there are no winners in war.

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For my 45th birthday I got a memorable gift. People from my husband's office came home and celebrated it. Since we couldn't celebrate our kid's birthday, we celebrated my birthday with happiness.

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Regardless of the challenges women face, they fight back against those challenges and come forward to reintegrate into the community. Women heading their own households try their best to improve the living standards of their families whilst fighting hard against socio-economic and cultural issues. They are engaged and involved in community/social service and income generating activities, and are looking for foreign employment opportunities, while providing for their families.

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Some women forget bad incidents which happened in their lives and add events that bring happiness into their lives. Remarrying and living as a family again brings happiness, and economic prosperity. Meeting new people in society gives us opportunity to lead a happy life. I derive happiness from the fact that my sister's children are involved in sports, social service, and in the medical field.

\* දිසියා කියිවී වියසිම + (6136 62200 9.2 かううちの こののであ + Pressons cords and 200 to produced Bizzer 200206 2084 20 CS + stort m ap odig a crace con contra Bassin andres (500) 2220-8-200 23-2000 4 5CA 320 208620 200 1 5800 G-CO 200 2020 2020 G-CO 200 2020 2020 G-CO 200

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> "We need loved ones of our families, not a miserable life."

> > Lo, B2/00 2016

3/2/2/2 - B21-011

Borno 3/6, 62, 56,

Though women have shortcomings, they address them and develop their skills. There are still unaddressed issues even though the war was ended. The government should undertake initiatives that will stop the emergence of another war. Justice should be there for everyone and more attention should be given to war affected women. Likewise, the youth should be taken away from the wrong path and guided to take part in achieving sustainable peace in the country.

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6 බට බට ගැන මහා 2002කිරියක් දියි \* විවිධ සමාජ ක්ෂේදයාර හා ගැනට හින මා 2002 කෙන් හා දානාකාර විසාන \* විමින් / කරනාක මෙන්ත් පමණි \* දිදුම වුණ්දු හිමි දිලාත් කෙද හැද ගැනීමෙන් මා නාම ප්රාර්තිමේ ගෙවි. Women feel happy and proud when they engage in treating everyone in the village with fairness and as equals, make kids study well and leading them to reach higher levels, helping fellow women, engaging in work related higher studies, being honest at work places, helping women who face challenges in society, economic upliftment, raising voice against injustice, working along with women and children, and creating friend circles. Whatever they have done so far for the society is insufficient, they expect to do more for society in the future using more opportunities. 20තිනෙතා අතර කැදීම ඇතිව රටේ තරුණා අයට ත්රක්ෂාෂයක් අව,වී තියන බත් හා අතතාර වටත් තරඳහන් තිබ.

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වෙතර වැරදි අඩු වෙඩු හැදා ගත්තා. ඔබෙන් ලා දැන් වෙරට වඩා ගත්තිමත් හමුත් සමහර අඩු පාවු හදාගත්තා පුමරුදුම් කිබේ. දෙදා-. හිත්තේ තෝන්තිය දරුවන නමුත් සමහර අඩු පාවු හදාගානේ පුමරුදුම් කිබේ. දෙදා-. හුත්තේ තෝන්තිය දරුවන

මට පෙන්ත් අය සමග සම්බාධ හිලා වැඩ කරගා නිසා භැකියාවත් වන් දී ළැමට බැති දී අත් අය ද මා ළිත්තා තකානාක ඔවට තක්වී කිරීම. හෙර නක්වයාටකා මා ගැන සක්ලියි. නිළා ක මං කත් සමකර කීර්ණ නිකා කතාගයක් මට මා පසුකුළුලි කි.
Neither justice nor other people assisted women in their lives. It was self confidence that saw them through. Due to their confidence, they are making great strides despite the bad memories from the past. These memories serve to motivate further.

வைழகள் (வடுக்கள்

Bonerroy



These pictures capture suspicion, fear, sadness, anger, happiness and some emotions of women...











These representations will forever symbolize shock, depression, emotional trauma, their loved ones experienced.









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## Hambantota District







Let us not define women as soft flowers but rather as strong diamonds for that is how we have always been Tharshika yogeswaran

ALC ON

2017

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My son was abducted on 14.8.2006 in Kodikamam, after a bomb exploded in the neighborhood. The families were trying to settle down. By evening I found my son missing and went to army nearby to ask. I heard that he was sent to Palai. Some people blamed it on LTTE. I know he had no affiliation with any groups. He has been the bread winner for our family. It has been 12 years but still no information about him. I have gone everywhere with his details and live in hope . People even tried to cheat me saying 120k will get my son back. I have even traveled to Colombo, Anuradhapura, Mathakal Joseph camp with new clothes and food for my son hoping that my son will be returned. My search still continues for my son who would be 41 years now.

Jaffna District



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Centre for Equality and Justice

325A1, Thimbirigasyaya Road, Colombo 05, Sri Lanka Tel/Fax: +94 11 2055404, +94 11 2501457 email: srilanka.cej@gmail.com

website: www.cejsrilanka.org

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