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# SACEM malar

SOCIETY FOR THE AID OF CEYLON(SRI LANKA) MINORITIES

இலங்கைச் சிறுபான்மையினர் நலன்பேண் மன்றம்

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## SACEM - Looking Beyond The 20th Century:

Anniversaries serve as occasions to review the past and evaluate the tasks that have been accomplished. But, more importantly they are today regarded as occasions to think of the future and the uncertainties associated with the path ahead. In the period we live in - characterized by events like 9/11 - the future looks more like a challenge to be faced with resolution and courage rather than with security and glibness!

To us at SACEM, the 20th anniversary of our Association evokes many sentiments. Firstly, it is one of surprise; that time has moved so swiftly, and we have managed to survive in an era of rapid change amidst so many ups and downs. Secondly, it is one of gratitude towards a communi-

ty, which has inspired and sustained us, and towards the many members of the community who have helped and supported us. Thirdly, there is the sentiment of Hope and Optimism in regard to our future.



Our hope rests largely on two pillars that have proved to be SACEM's foundation over the past twenty years. The first is our dedication to Volunteerism. SACEM has practiced and promoted Volunteerism in season and out of season over the past years. As we move into our third decade, we are confident that volunteerism will be the wave of the future, and our association will continue to thrive. The second pillar of SACEM's success is Relevance. Over the years SACEM has constantly evaluated its programs and policies to determine their relevance to the prevalent needs of the community. Through this process, new



programs have evolved such as youth volunteerism, Battling Addictions, Enlightened Parenting, Internet for Seniors, etc. It has been an exciting 20 years that we can be proud to celebrate. We are confident that with this continuing mindset and foundation, the next decade will be even more exciting than the past 20.

## ***Projects in the planning.....***

### **SACEM Anniversary Projects:**

To date, two major projects have been lined up to mark the 20th anniversary of SACEM:

1) "Vision for the third decade" publication release. This is a collection of articles forecasting the trends and forces that will affect our community in the years to come. The various authors suggest ways we can progress and face challenges in the years to come based on these trends. This publication is scheduled for publication in early summer 2003.

2) "Health Fair 2003". This event will inform and educate those in attendance to the more prevalent health problems affecting the community at the present time. It's primary focus will be mental health, Alzheimer's, cancer and other diseases affecting our community. We anticipate the participation of medical professionals at this event scheduled for August 2003.

3) The celebration of SACEM's 20th anniversary is expected to take place in fall 2003. Details on this event will be provided in our next newsletter.

## **Redevelopments in North and East Regions of Sri Lanka:**

"We have lots of things to do" said Professor A. Navaratnarajah when he referred to the socio economic development in the north-east part of Sri Lanka. On September 14, 2002, SACEM organized a panel discussion on the recent development in Sri Lanka and invited Professor Nava to be our chief guest.

The harsh life conditions and difficulties imposed on the people living in these areas were beyond our imagination! Although they found various indigenous solutions as a matter of survival, the condition of life in these areas are below any reasonable level. Prof. Nava brought to the table some projects, which he believes will help to ease the difficulties forced upon the people of these regions. He refers to these projects as "self-sustainable", developed for those who would like to consider a business investment for profit. He has also created social and humanitarian projects for like-minded individuals and organizations.

Whether one's in it for profit or charity, it appears that we can contribute in the redevelopment of the northeastern areas and help our people gain some dignity and respect back into their lives! SACEM asks for your support in helping our Prof. in his endeavors to make a difference for those suffering in Sri Lanka! For more details, please call SACEM at (416) 291 9972.

### **House Wiring and Rewinding project in Chillalai, Sri Lanka:**

On January 16, 2003, SACEM donated Rs 65,000 to The Refugees Rehabilitation Organization (TRRO) to fund a 6-month training course in house wiring and rewinding. The past president and the current advisory committee member of SACEM,

V.T. Vasanthakumar along with Mr. Muthuratnandan, Deputy General Manager, Northern Region of Ceylon Electricity Board participated in the opening of the training center in Chillalai, Sri Lanka. It is expected that about 30 young men and women will benefit from this training.

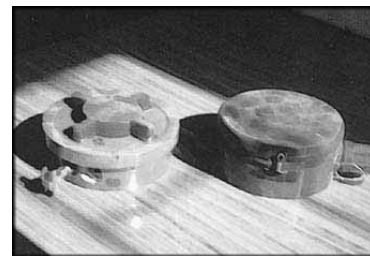


It is a very timely and much needed project as the electricity board is working to distribute electricity to the northern areas. However, due to several years of war, many houses in this region require repairs including rewiring. Mr. Muthuratnandan has promised to provide the training free of charge to all those who successfully complete this course. Due to the shortage of electricians, it is expected that these candidates will have a fair chance in securing jobs upon completion of the course and the hands-on job training.

SACEM is interested in continuing this and other similar projects throughout various locations in Sri Lanka and we require your financial assistance. We believe that by supporting these projects, will not only help families financially, but also provide the urgently needed skilled labour and human capital for the redevelopment of our country. Please help.

## Landmine removal Project in the North and East Sri Lanka:

On February 13, 2003, SACEM, along with Canadian Tamils Chamber of Commerce (CTCC), was invited to participate in the meeting organized by the Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI), a not-for-profit organization headquartered in New York City. Along with HDI, HALO Trust, a UK based not-for-profit organization specializing in land mine removal, and ONE SRILANKA Foundation, a California based not-for-profit organization, we determined a mission to raise world wide funding to completely eliminate the landmine menace in Sri Lanka.



It is estimated, based on The HALO Trust's Mine and Danger area survey of Northern Sri Lanka in 2002 that approximately 14.5 square miles, representing 26% of the area surveyed are deemed high danger zones. 62% of the remaining area is deemed "medium danger" and the remaining 12% is deemed as low danger. It is estimated that a few million US Dollars is the price tag needed to remove all the mines in Sri Lanka. Upon raising the funds, the length of this operation would be approximately 2 to 3 years.

SACEM and CTCC were quite impressed with this project and the professionalism and effort taken by the above mentioned organizations. It is anticipated, upon the approval of SACEM and CTCC boards, that this project will be kick started in Canada (in partnership with abovementioned organizations) within a few weeks.

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## Parenting - Communicating with Adolescent Children:

Upon assuming the chair for Family Support, Indirani Nagendiram decided that one of her top priorities was to discover the needs plaguing parents and supervisors in today's community. After establishing the questions and problems associated with present parenting, she introduced seminars and workshops where parents and youths could voice their concerns and discuss these issues with other concerned individuals and professionals in this field. In doing so, she blazed a trail, and her style of communicating with people achieved results beyond expectation.

Due the popularity of this program, Indirani is hoping to prepare a drama presentation along with the collaboration of SACEM treasurer, Herman Vijjakumar, which will characterize and illustrate the lessons learned from the previous seminars and workshops. The time and place of this performance will be announced at a later date. Way to Go Indirani!

## A Celebration of Youth Volunteerism:

On Friday the 15th of November 2002, SACEM held its first annual project entitled "Celebration of Youth Volunteerism" at its meeting hall at 5200 Finch Avenue East in Scarborough. The participants in this event consisted of twelve young men and women between the ages of 18 and 22. They were invited to share and reflect upon their experiences as volunteers within our community.



The objectives of the 'Celebration', as explained by project Chairperson Stanley Sellakumar, was to bring awareness and recognition to the volunteer work our youth are called upon to do as part of their school curriculum. It also allowed the audience, as members of the community, to show our appreciation of their work. By calling upon our youth to speak in public on this subject,

and any other issues in which they are involved, SACEM hopes to aid them in developing their leadership skills.

Perhaps one of the finest comments reflecting the mood of 'Celebration' came from the parent of one of the participants, who stated: "I knew that for the past few years, my son was engaged in doing volunteer work. However, until today when I heard him speak from the platform, I did not realize how mature he has become and how responsible he is turning out to be. I thank SACEM for organizing this function". In view of the considerable success of this event, Stanley is planning to conduct events of this nature in the future.

## **BBBB Project**

Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers Access Project is designed to ensure that ethno-racial/cultural communities have full and equal access to high quality mental health and addiction services from the services provided by Center for Addiction and Mental Health.

The focus of the project is two fold:

- 1) To raise awareness of addiction and mental health issues in ethno-racial and ethno-cultural communities.
- 2) To increase access to the services and programs at the Center's Addiction Programs and General Psychiatry Services for ethno-racial and

ethno-cultural communities

The objectives of the project was to:

Identify systemic barriers that created because of racism, cultural insensitivity, language barriers, western model of treatment, inequitable access to information, networks, resources, participation in decision-making, experience and expertise;

Modify services, especially at entry points like emergency rooms, assessment clinics, intake settings, consultation services and outreach services; Work in collaboration with community groups and service providers to address stigma and aid early identification, treatment and prevention of mental health and addiction problems.

Five ethnic groups were chosen for this pilot project: Chinese, Polish, Ethiopian, Punjabi and Tamil groups. SACEM was invited to represent the Tamil community in the Project and to serve in the Project Management Team and in the Research Team.

Number of focus groups and surveys were held before a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Report was prepared and submitted.

Now we are in the process of having focus groups of selected members of the community with the staff members of CAMH to bring out the culturally sensitive issues faced by our community when accessing services.

## Other Projects:

### **Work shop and Drama of addictions:**

A workshop and drama presentation regarding addictions is in the works. It will exemplify how drugs, alcohol and other societal issues affect the

successful adaptation of immigrants in Canada. This will be produced under the supervision of Naga Ramalingam, past President and a chairperson for funding proposals. It is scheduled for production sometime in July 2003. Details to follow.

### **Seminar on Leadership:**

Stanley Selvakumar, Chairperson for Youth, is plan-

ning a seminar concentrating on developing leadership skills amongst our youths. We witnessed the success of the workshops involving youth volunteerism and hope that the same energy and success will be illustrated at this next event. We anticipate a large number of our youths participating in this coming seminar, which is scheduled for June 2003.

## ***Letter to SACEM Members:***

Dear members:

Over the past two decades, the Sri Lankan community has adopted Canada as its own and has accepted the lifestyle of this country. As part of adapting to this new life, we have gone through several changes and our needs have changed significantly. With each passing year, we have gained confidence in our ability to speak the language diminishing the need for translators. We have become our own businessmen and woman negating the need for financial and social benefits. We have learned the customs of our new land allowing us a certain acceptance within our new city.

However, this very freedom and independence which we have worked hard to achieve over the past years is likely to spoil a certain percentage of our youths and eventually destroy their lives. As their familiarity and acceptance grows within this society their association to alcohol, drug and gambling addiction increases as do excessive internet chatting, gang violence etc. All these societal influences appear to be on the rise within our community. Many adults and families would welcome the knowledge of professionals to help them deal with these crises within their own families.

On the other side of the world, our countrymen, women and children in Sri Lanka need our support and assistance. It is my humble opinion that we should pool our resources together and participate in various socio-economic and humanitarian projects in the North and East regions of Sri Lanka. After all, if we do not take care of our own, who else will!

Sri Lankans need our help and, by joining hands and donating our time and money, as much as we can afford, we can assist our brothers and sisters back home in their plight for a better life. By taking small steps, we can make a tremendous difference! Are we up for this challenge?

Yours truly,  
Jonathan Visva

# *What is "out of box" thinking?*

Do you know that many of us build a comfort zone around us and make decisions consistently to be within this comfort zone? Human behavior often results in compromised decision making and the inability to reach our maximum potential in all aspects of life due to habitual thought patterns.

By initiating small changes into the pattern of your day-to-day activities, you can breakdown these barriers and expand your limits. For instance, you can volunteer (as our youth are doing) and realize the difficulties others are faced with. You can travel to a new area of town and realize how cultures different from ours live their daily lives or take the time to truly weigh out the pros and cons of a problem you are facing and tackle it in a manner different from the usual. You may find it a little uncomfortable or even nagging at the beginning, however, once you get used your expanded boundaries, you will form a new comfort zone. This will allow you to see the many different aspects of a situation rather than the consistent view you are looking at now.



We can relate to this idea by comparing it to a child's learning how to walk. Although a child is very hesitant at the outset to take a step, and often falls down while he/she is learning, its determination and desire wins him/her the successes. During this process, the child often looks out for objects to hold on to as it is afraid to stand on its own! However, with practice, the nervousness desists and gives way to the confidence and comfort that he/she needs to stand up and walk independently. As you may realize, in each of these steps, the child is constantly fighting within its comfort zone to reach the next level. At all levels in life, we must continue to strive to achieve our goals and not get hung up by the obstacles that appear in our way.

Unfortunately, as we grow older, we do not push ourselves to this same extent which often results in compromised solutions and a negation of our own sense of self and our ability to further ourselves. Although we may have ambitions, visions and desires for our future, if we cannot get out of our box now, it is more than likely that we will not be able to reach our future goals! Do not get stuck in your box, look at the alternatives, accept different perceptions, believe in your ability to achieve!

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## **PUBLISHED BY**

**SOCIETY FOR THE AID OF CEYLON (SRI LANKA) MINORITIES**  
**301 - 5200 FINCH AVENUE EAST**  
**SCARBOROUGH ONTARIO M1S 4Z5**  
**TEL: 416 291 9972 FAX: 416 291 5590**  
**WEB: WWW.SACEM.CA**