

Madame Chair, I thank the Forum for this opportunity and here I like to speak on the topic of The Realities of Minority Women's Political Participation in Sri Lanka- The Forming of the Other as the Moral Self .

Sri Lanka was once known for its mix of tradition, modernity and peaceful coexistence of its diverse cultures. The Sri Lankan state ended a bloody thirty year civil war in 2009, affecting many lives, especially in the North and East, resulting in a total figure of displacement at over one million. This is no longer only an "ethnic" affair but rather a "post war scenario," sustained by many factors including the national question, rural poverty, and unemployment. Today it denotes South Asia's most dramatic failure at modern nation building

The political culture that has evolved out of the war in Sri Lanka has provided undue advantages to people in power while limiting opportunities for citizens to make informed choices through political participation. The war has also contributed to the destruction of checks and balances at local and national levels of government and other institutions.

Marginalized communities in Sri Lanka have been made passive and dependant on handouts by the war. They have made to lose motivation for advancement, giving way to a "learned helplessness," with a culture of suspicion and mistrust. The local government structures were severely compromised during the war, completely unable to function in many areas. Many communities were completely displaced during the course of the war, losing their ability to participate politically. As communities return and are resettled in the North and East, they are unfamiliar with or distrustful of local governance bodies. The communities are not aware or trusting of the opportunities they have to advocate for themselves and gain access to services that they are entitled to. The end of the war is an opportunity to create a vibrant civil society at regional and grassroots level to advocate for democratic participation and the respect for human rights.

Although Sri Lankan women record a high-level of literacy, social development, participation in local-level of associational engagement, political representation at local or provincial or national levels continues to

remain dismally low; not exceeding six percent of elected representatives.

- Various Minority Women Groupings
 - Tamil women, muslim women ,Burger women
 - Minorities within minorities- Fragmented identity
- Less than 6% female elected representatives even though women won the right to vote in 1931- Jaffna in 2009 was 13.4 but today at the local election it is only 4%- women were given opportunities by political parties when it was dangerous to contest- women and youth scenario
- During the war women took the unconventional social role however the DDR process does not recognise that with female ex-combatants
- Women's domain didn't extend beyond their households during no-war periods
- In difficult times minority women has become as symbolic markers of purity and respect to organize and mobilize decent
- Clubbing youth and women in one category
- Effective DE-militarization is talking longer than anticipated which is an impediment in the women's participation in all forms of life and has a greater impact on political participation in the context where culture of suspicion of the other is very prevalent
- Current context and Problem
 - Impact of Post-War on Exclusion and Inclusion
 - Negotiating Space in Winners Take It All Context

After years of lobbying, local government reforms currently being discussed include a quota of 25% for women and youth. This provision is however clearly inadequate because it combines women and youth with no guarantee of an exclusive quota for women, and also because non compliance will not attract any penalties. The government has justified this weak provision on various questionable grounds including mairinating that very few women are interested in politics and that women's political

representation is antithetical to Sri Lankan culture and that this demand is fuelled mainly by middle class 'NGO women' who are trying to force women into politics. Other responses include, that parties are only interested in winning horses, and women are not winning horses, or that a return to a ward system, which is being proposed under local government reforms will automatically increase representation, although there is no evidence to suggest that this will be the case.

Recently the Sri Lankan government has also sought to explain away the low levels of political representation of women to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), attributing it to women's own choices, their preoccupation with multiple roles, the high costs of electoral campaigns and the lack of confidence of political parties in the ability of women to win votes. The Committee, in its Concluding Observations, reminded the government, in no uncertain terms, that it has a legal obligation to take all necessary measures to increase the representation of women in politics and public life at the local, provincial and national levels, including resorting to temporary special measures, such as introduction of quotas or financial support to women candidates. In addition, it also called on the Government to take all steps to highlight to society as a whole the importance of women's full and equal participation in leadership positions, in all sectors and at all levels.