



Our Dream of a Place where Peace Prevails



Foreword

Throughout half a year around the Millennium, 71 researchers armed with piles of notebooks, flip charts, and pens penetrated the lives of the children in Batticaloa and Ampara districts in Sri Lanka. In these areas war has been a part of life since 1983 where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE, initiated their fight for an independent state, Tamil Eelam, in the North and East of Sri Lanka. As the war has been ongoing ever since, the children here have never experienced but violence and unrest.

When Save the Children Norway/Eastern Project chose to send their research teams into even the most remote, poor, or war torn village, the main aim was to get a thorough understanding of to what extent the children are affected by the war. The intention with the study was also to get an overview of how the existing system of government agencies, international, and local organisations help the children in their day-to-day life. The final result was a cupboard full of diaries, flip charts, drawings and reports documenting the lives of children of all 12 divisions in Batticaloa as well as the 20 divisions in Ampara. The research teams reached 2000 children directly. Amongst other things these children were asked to write about their parents, siblings, friends, games, home, school, and village. This input material was

combined with interviews, talk-shops, and workshops for parents, priests, principals, development officers, police, and the many others concerned with children in each division. Altogether, the research in The Child Study covers the lives of around 100.000 children.

Studies on psychosocial effects of war on children most often take their starting point in adults' perceptions with the risk of leading adults to focus on the impacts of the conflict instead of on the way that children cope with the situation. The Child Study has given the children of Batticaloa and Ampara the opportunity to speak out and give their own versions of the war. The study emphasises that the way the children perceive their war-torn everyday life is very different to that of an adult's. It also reveals that the children are extremely resilient and powerful, and are thus very capable of managing the daily problems.

However, it should never be underestimated that being born and raised with war has long-term effects that will influence the rest of the children's lives as well as the society as a whole. This has already been proven only too well in other troubled parts of the world. Some of these experiences have been included in Our dream of a place where peace prevails this way putting the lives and the future of the children in Batticaloa and Ampara into a wider perspective.

The fact is that every child has a right to be protected against any kind of war and violence. This is stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is signed by almost all countries, including Sri Lanka. No single child on earth should become used to living with war and growing up without knowing peace. In addition, the same convention very clearly states that every child has a right to live with it's parents, to go to school, to health, proper housing and food, as well as to be heard in each situation concerning his or her own life. All these rights have also become victims of the conflict. Thus, there is an immediate need to find a solution to end the war and to have a plan of continuous support to the children respecting their own needs and wishes.

This book, Our dream of a place where peace prevails, contains a selected part of the research, as no book can hold the study in full. Names have been changed and place-names have been left out in several statements in order to protect the children. But otherwise the team behind the book has stuck to the children's own writings and drawings and tried to pick out the statements that most clearly explain the children's viewpoints representing different parts of the region. Although each division has its unique problems, the children also share many of their thoughts, worries, joys and dreams – regardless of division, religion, and ethnicity.

Not least, they all express their dream of a peaceful future again and again.

© Lotte Ladegaard

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