



DIPLOMACY TRAINING

Report on the DTP 12th Annual Human Rights and Peoples' Diplomacy Training Program

25th February – 15th March 2002

The 12th Annual Human Rights and People's Diplomacy Training Program was held at the Trans Asia Hotel, in Colombo Sri Lanka, from 25 February- 15 March 2002. This year we worked in partnership with Lawyers for Human Rights and Development (LHRD), an organisation based in Colombo and committed to human rights education, advocacy and litigation of human rights issues in Sri Lanka. In addition we had a third partner this year in the Frederich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Colombo office, a German government funded organisation for the promotion of human rights, democracy and social justice around the world.

For this year's training, DTP received 84 applications by the closing date on October 31, 2001, which provided a good pool from which to choose participants, according to our pre-determined selection criteria, which aims to select active human rights defenders from credible NGOs within the region, with sensitivity to geographical and gender balance, and contingent on two positive recommendations for each participant. From this group of applications 42 were selected as successful applicants. Successful applicants had to find funding for course fees and travel, due for payment on February 8 2002. From this group, 27 applicants were able to find funding to attend the training.

With regards to gender balance, this year's group was skewed with the number of men outnumbering women (9 women, 18 men) due to more men being able to find funds than women. However, this did not adversely affect group dynamics or the focus of training topics. With regards to geographic balance, we had a good representation of countries from the Asia Pacific, with a slighter greater representation from South Asia given the location of training. This balances last year's training held in Bangkok, Thailand, which had a slight skew towards countries in South East Asia. Participants this year came from: Australia (Indigenous) (1); Bhutan (1); Burma (Thai) (3); Cambodia (1); East Timor (1); Hong Kong (1); India (4); Indonesia (2); Nepal (1); Pakistan (3); Philippines (2); PNG (1); Sri Lanka (4); Thailand (2); Tonga (1). The standard of this year's participants were excellent, representing one of the best groups, which have undergone training.

The training was held at the Trans Asia Hotel in the heart of Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo. The facilities at the hotel were excellent. It was very convenient to have the accommodation and training venue at the same location. Computing and e-mail facilities for participants were located in the commercial areas of Colombo not far from the hotel, which was useful for participants who needed e-mail access given the prohibitively expensive costs of the hotel's business centre.

During training there were two staff from DTP (Joan Staples-Executive Director and Radhika Withana-Arahchi-Program Director) as well as staff from our partner organisations: Ms Ramani Thotagamuwa from LHRD and Ms. Anke Taubert from

FES. All four worked well together dealing with various logistical and financial matters. Throughout the pre training phase we liaised very closely with key staff of both organisations in the co-ordination and planning for the training. We particularly acknowledge Mr. Kalyananda Tiranagama Executive Director of LHRD and Ms. Lakmali Cabral senior legal officer with LHRD. From FES we acknowledge Mr. Dietmar Kneitschel Sri Lanka representative of FES, and Ms. Rohini Peiris, senior administrative officer of FES.

The training program provided, resembled past DTP curricula, covering public international law, international human rights law, UN human rights agencies and procedures, the six treaty bodies and refugee rights, the UN role in international peacekeeping, regional human rights mechanisms, international humanitarian law, globalisation and international financial institutions, and international environmental law, lobbying, strategic advocacy, media training, and internet training. There were also some additions this year including a session on good governance at local, regional and governmental levels. Reflecting the changed priorities of the global community in light of the terrorist attacks in America and their implications for many countries of the region, we also had a session on Draft Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism and its implications for civil and political rights within many countries of the region. Also there was a session on international labour rights conducted by the local representative for FES in Colombo, Mr. Dietmar Kneitschel. Furthermore a session on HIV/AIDS and human rights was also including on the advice of LHRD who identified this topic as an important emerging issue for human rights activists.

In addition, participants had an opportunity to share their stories and information about their country in the nightly country reports, which were rated highly by participants in the final evaluation of the program. Informal sharing of experience and knowledge between participants was also facilitated by the two field trips that were organised. One recreation field trip to Kandy, allowed participants to see the culture and history of the host country, while also assisting in the formation of strong group dynamics. The course-related field trip to the offices of our partner organisations (LHRD and FES) also allowed participants to learn about the various work of other NGOs involved in human rights, and also to learn about other networks of human rights activists.

An extensive array of training material was used to supplement the learning of participants during sessions. Material included relevant international treaties, UN declarations and other material, information booklets, fact sheets and other handouts serving as background information for a particular topic. As in previous years, a training manual was also provided, intended for use as a reference tool and covering the topics taught during training. We have been fortunate to have chapters contributed by many distinguished human rights academics and thinkers, and this year we were again able to include several new chapters. New chapters included:

- Children's rights by Philip Alston and John Tobin
- Economic, Social and Cultural rights- Diane Otto
- International Criminal Law- Kriangsak Kittichaisaree
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment Torture- Radhika Withana-Arachchi
- International Peacekeeping- Radhika Withana-Arachchi and Jose Campino
- International Labour Rights- Dietmar Kneitschel

In Sri Lanka, we had 15 trainers including our usual distinguished DTP trainers such as Dr. Sarah Pritchard, Dr. Clarence Dias, and Jose Campino. In addition we had a

new mix of distinguished international (Ravi Nair) and local trainers (Sunila Abeysekera, Deepika Udagama).

There was a formal evaluation of trainers by the participants. The trainers were individually assessed on their performance on a number of criteria including clear presentation, coherence, knowledge provided and so on. In the assessment of DTP staff present during the training program, we saw many distinguished presenters who were able to effectively, and at times inspiringly communicate the ideas of their respective topics in an informative, inclusive and meaningful way.

From the evaluations, it is evident that we were very fortunate to have some excellent trainers, with 13 out of total 17 trainers rated in the good to excellent range. It is pleasing to note that all trainers scored at or above the average range.

There was also a formal evaluation of the overall program. This was given to participants to answer on the final day of the training, after the end of the role-play. This evaluation also allowed for free responses on the best and worst sessions and suggestions for improvement of the program. Overall, respondents rated the training program as being good to excellent (59% excellent, 41% good). On more specific questions relating to interest generated by course, coherence, knowledge provided and skills learnt all answers rated close to excellent in the good to excellent range (based on mean ratings). Trainer-participant interaction is also rated highly in the same range, which suggests that, the participants appreciate the participatory or Socratic method of teaching emphasised in DTP training methodology. General logistical support provided by the DTP to participants was judged close to excellent.

With regards to the most useful sessions, it is pleasing to note that nearly all topics covered were judged useful. Likewise it is most heartening to note that respondents found none of the topics superfluous. Asked which session was the least useful, comments included 'none' or 'all were excellent.' Overall the best aspects of the program according to the responses were the knowledge and exposure to new information, practical skills learnt, sharing experiences with others, meeting people with diverse backgrounds and making new friends.

In addition this year, we introduced another evaluation regarding the role-play. This self-evaluation questionnaire asked participants to judge their own performance and the usefulness of the three weeks training in the preparation and performance in the role play. This evaluation was intended to determine in a more formal approach, the learning gained in the three weeks, which is the educative intent of the final day role-play.

The participants felt that preparation for and performance in the role-play relied on and benefited from the past three weeks of training in human rights law, treaty bodies, the UN System and international law. In addition they felt that the role-play allowed them to use the lobbying and advocacy skills learnt in the past three weeks, in a very practical way.

Overall, the 12th Annual Program was very successful. Procedures and systems for selection of participants, preparation and delivery of program, and working with partners worked well. All DTP staff, both those who attended and those who remained in the office are to be commended for the outstanding effort and solid planning responsible for minimising problems and ensuring that delivery was as smooth as possible. Likewise, the success of the training could not have been accomplished without the assistance of our partner organisations, LHRD and FES.

LHRD both leading up to and during the training was integral to the co-ordination of local logistical matters and the identification of suitable local trainers. Their advice on matters of the organisation of training was invaluable. FES provided generous monetary support to the training, covering all participant food and accommodation (except the Australian participant as per German foreign ministry funding criteria). Furthermore FES also funded the travel of participants in countries where an FES office was located: this amounted to 12 participants having their travel generously sponsored by FES. However FES was invaluable as a partner assisting in all matters of planning for the program, including hotel/venue bookings, participant flights etc. LHRD and FES are to be thanked and congratulated for contributing to the success of the 12th Annual Human Rights and People's Diplomacy Training Program.