

Institute of National Security Studies
Round Table Discussion on
“Securing Sri Lanka through Community Engagement”

20th August 2021 from 1400hrs – 1630hrs (IST) via Zoom

-Press Release-

Institute of National Security Studies (INSS), the premier think tank on National Security established under the Ministry of Defence organized a virtual Round Table Discussion titled “Securing Sri Lanka through Community Engagement” which was held on the 20th of August 2021 from 1400 hrs – 1630 hrs (IST) via Zoom. Hon. Governor of Eastern Province, Mrs. Anuradha Yahampath graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. The Guest Speakers for the event were Dr. Dayani Panagoda, Director Technical, Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Activity at Global Communities, Colombo, Dr. Rasheen Bappu, Adjunct Professor, Anthropologist & Intelligence Data Scientist, Mr. Shafqat Munir, Research Fellow and Head, Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research (BCTR) at Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) and Hon. Research Fellow at Institute of National Security Studies (INSS), and Ms. Nahdiya Danish, Lawyer, Educator, and Interfaith Activist. Professor Rohan Gunaratna, Director General of INSS chaired and moderated the event. The audience comprised of representatives from ministries, Sri Lankan armed forces intelligence services, academia, think tanks and Civil Security Department.

Professor Rohan Gunaratna commenced the session by commending the efforts taken by Mrs. Anuradha Yahampath, Hon. Governor of Eastern Province to build a Harmony Centre at Kattankudy in Eastern Province, the hometown of the deadliest group that mounted the Easter Sunday Attack. He stated that it is vital to integrate the communities to love and respect one another.

Hon. Governor, speaking of the Eastern Province stated that anything that happens in the East has National significance and at times even global significance as well. She stated that the Eastern Province is home to many minority populations. There was an influx of foreign funding and expansion of Wahhabi interpretation of Islam taking place in certain parts of the province which is densely populated and this has had serious consequences on national security and communal harmony in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Dayani Panagoda provided a detailed explanation of the participatory approach of community resilience. She highlighted that community resilience is a commitment to people’s ownership and participation through various activities and methodologies that have been implemented around the world.

The next speaker, Dr. Rasheen Bappu enlightened the audience on the role society played in supporting national security to overcome threats posed by violent extremism. He stated that National security is often considered a duty of the government and the military. He then educated the audience on the need to focus on non-military dimensions of national security. He pointed out that all the communities should accommodate and respect other religious beliefs and promote moderation, toleration, and co-existence.

Mr. Shafqat Munir provided an insightful explanation of the role of evolving technologies in community engagement strategies aimed at combating radicalization. He further stated that advanced technologies facilitate easier access to information of radical nature. Technology acts as an echo chamber where individuals find their ideas supported and echoed by other like-minded individuals. Conversely, he

stated that the growth in technology made it a great apparatus for community engagement in present society making it a perfect tool for widespread community engagement.

The last speaker, Ms. Nahdiya Danish, Attorney-at-Law, Educator, and Interfaith Activists provided an elaborate presentation discussing the role of the educational sector in interfaith dialogue and peace-building. She urged that it was important for education platforms to self-regulate to strengthen children's commitment to justice, respect for human rights, and the promotion of harmonious relationships between individuals and societies.

An opportunity was also given for a special invitee, Mr. Asfar Mohamed, Chairman of Urban Council, Kattankudy to address the audience where he commended on initiatives taken to build a harmony centre at Kattankudy and further stated that harmony should come from the community itself. He further illustrated that he is dedicated to building a harmonious and resilient society in Kattankudy.

The discussion concluded with an insightful and a thought-provoking discussion. It was focused on building a solid platform to engage entities responsible for National Security to work with community partners to enhance social cohesion and national unity.