



Institute of National Security Studies

Public Lecture

“Grappling with Floods to Secure Socio-economic Security”

16th of July 2021 – 1000hrs – 11.30hrs via zoom

Press Release

Institute of National Security Studies; the premier think tank on national security established under the Ministry of Defence, organized a Public Lecture titled “Grappling with Floods to Secure Socio-economic Security,” on a virtual platform on the 16th of July 2021 from 1000-1130 hours. The guest speaker for the occasion was Professor Rekha Nianthi, Head of the Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya. The session was graced by nearly 60 interested researchers, policy makers, academia and officers from tri-forces. Rear Admiral Dimuthu Gunawardena, Director of Communication and Publication at INSS moderated the session.

Following her introduction, Professor Nianthi presented a holistic view of the flood situation in Sri Lanka. It encompassed the technical and scientific basis of floods & how it affects different parts of the country. She then delved into the causes of floods. The latter part of her presentation focused on the way forward in mitigating flood incidence in Sri Lanka. On the macro level, she identified global climate change, unplanned urbanization & development projects, loss of natural wetlands & the people’s attitudes as main attributes of floods. Importantly, she noted that hazards are natural & will keep occurring. They only become disasters when people’s exposure and vulnerability to them increase. Thus, on the micro or the individual level, fragile livelihoods, lack of opportunities, lack of social support, & poor-quality houses were considered as vulnerability inducing factors. Professor highlighted that preventive actions are more vital than disaster management itself. Preventive measures can be taken through comprehensive studies which identify the deep-rooted socio-economic factors behind flood-related disasters & consequently, the vulnerability level of the country. Ultimately, the studies should support capacity-building to face hazards resiliently and reduce the risk of disaster.

Professor Nianthi offered a vast array of steps that can be taken to minimize the socio-economic & human losses caused by floods. Hazard and risk assessment, monitoring & warning, evacuation, land use planning & management, relocation, education & awareness, protecting natural areas such as wetlands, risk transfer insurances, infrastructure policy, reservoirs building, and reforestation. Apart from preventive actions, she stated that it is equally important to adapt, or to learn to live with floods in a sustainable manner. This was demonstrated through examples from countries such as Bangladesh & Japan. Furthermore, she elaborated the importance of using

traditional methods to deal with disaster risk reduction. She used the example of building reservoirs by the ancestors to regulate floods and the mechanisms used in the process.

On a different note, the guest speaker did not forget to commend the progressive measures already initiated or completed by the government towards flood risk reduction. She appreciated the efficient evacuation process undertaken by the government during the occurrence of the Burawi cyclone which resulted in a complete eradication of human casualties. Declaration of Baddegana as a wetland zone & a flood protection area was viewed positively. The construction of a drainage system in Modara was commended as well. The efforts by the Meteorological Department through the incorporation of new technology were recognized. How striking a proper balance between development and disasters was key to the progress of Sri Lanka was well emphasized by Professor Nianthi. As the way forward, she asserted that Sri Lanka must adopt the provisions in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 & Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Expressing his opinion on the topic, Major General Sudantha Ranasinghe, Director General of Disaster Management Center spoke on the tasks and missions that the Disaster Management Center has initiated to address the security threat imposed by floods in the areas of mitigation, risk reduction, prevention, disaster management, validating his points on statistics and data. He emphasized that much work has already been done by the DMC and stated that they will be undertaking many projects in days to come. Also, he highlighted, DMC is open to work with interested intellectuals to share and gather their knowledge in the respective field. The session concluded with an interesting question and answer session where the audience learned a bunch of knowledge on the existing disaster management sphere.