
Tamil Information Centre

Evaluation Report

Weekend Seminar

International Human Rights Mechanisms and How to Use Them

Venue: Little Ilford Youth Centre, 1a Rectory Road, London, E12 6JB

Date: Saturday, 13th & Sunday 14th. September 1997

September 1997

Tamil Information Centre

Weekend Seminar

International Human Rights Mechanisms and How to Use Them

Evaluation Report

BACKGROUND

The international community has recognised that in the modern world human rights are the foundation for freedom, justice, and peace. One has to be aware that human rights are rights of ordinary people and not exclusive preserves of governments or other institutions. Only knowledge of human rights will enable ordinary people to seek avenues to confidently assert and enjoy them. The fundamental aspect of human rights work is therefore is to inform people and acquire adequate knowledge of what their rights and responsibilities are, how rights are protected, and what can be done when rights are violated. People need to know the international agreements that are intended to protect human rights and how individuals can protect their own and other people's rights.

This seminar was the first in a series designed to help people to understand the world in which they live and the interdependence of individuals, groups, and nations.

AIMS

The aim of the seminar was to provide participants an opportunity to look at the international human rights mechanisms and to learn how to use them. The seminar was conducted with assistance from Amnesty International, which has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO and the Council of Europe and whose objectives are in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

OBJECTIVES

The seminar was planned in such a manner to promote active participation of the participants and to enable them to (i) gain knowledge about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (ii) acquire an understanding of people's rights and the rights and responsibilities of governments, (iii) identify human rights issues as well as recognise the available tools and mechanisms to deal with them and (iv) provide an opportunity to acquire, practise and develop skills that are necessary to work on human rights issues.

PARTICIPANTS

The programme was designed particularly for people who are interested in human rights work. Ideally, Tamils involved in campaign, lobby and media work in Western countries. Although, the number of participants was restricted to thirty – 20 men and 10 women, the actual attendance was 33 from UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, USA and Australia. (See Annexure 1 for participants list). The seminar was conducted free of charge.

OVERVIEW OF THE SEMINAR

Methodology and Scope

The programme utilised different learning approaches. It encouraged active, participatory and experimental learning and offered positive alternative to frontal teaching in conventional lectures. Topics were introduced by the Amnesty International staff and visiting subject experts. (See annexure 2 for details). Central presentations were followed by structured discussions at group level. The groups were made sufficiently small in order to provide all participants with the opportunity to contribute. Case studies were used to support analyses. Film, exercises, question and answer sessions, role-play and simulations were used to practice new skills.

The seminar provided an understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It included overview of international human rights law, as well as the communication procedures, mechanisms and how the system works. It briefly dealt with structures of the international human rights regime. Participants were explained the procedures and the ways open to individuals and groups who want the United Nations to take action on human rights situations that are of concern to them. Particular attention was given to procedure available to people under the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Amnesty International way of information gathering, dissemination, media work and campaign to help people who suffer from repressive and cruel regimes were also taken up for discussion. The role of non-governmental organisations with consultative status with the UN was also dealt by the speakers briefly.

Interesting discussions took place on the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law. The matters covered were the laws of war; human rights law and humanitarian law; the sources of International Humanitarian Law – International Court of Justice; limiting the use of violence in conflicts; protection of non combatants; prisoners of war; International and Non international conflicts; Internal wars, Guerrilla warfare; rules applicable to armed opposition groups in the International Humanitarian Law; civilian combatants and non combatants; the principles of military necessity; humanity and human rights violations; hostage taking; treatment of civilian, sick and wounded; International criminal tribunals; ICRC fact finding missions and security council resolutions.

The seminar also looked into the role and functions of the United Nations specialised agencies, in particular the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The participants were introduced to the manner in which reports were sought from the governments of contracting states on the action they have taken to conform with conventions adopted, the procedures available to deal with complaints and disputes and the special procedure to cover freedom of association.

The two days seminar session was concluded with a practical exercise of looking at refugee issues and lobbying Members of Parliament.

EVALUATION

Evaluation forms were provided and participants were requested to complete and return the forms at the end of the two-day session. In addition, comments on the topics, lecturers, methodology, and timing were also sought from participants during tea and meal breaks. They were also asked to comment on the usefulness of the seminar and how to make improvements

to such educational seminars. Participants were asked to make their comments on the choice of the venue, time selected, seating arrangements, lighting arrangements, visual presentations, speakers, topics chosen, facilitators and refreshments served.

According to Amnesty staff and the specialists who participated, the participants were excellent. They said the participants were very enthusiastic, and some of them were resourceful. One member of the AI staff remarked that some of the participants were very sharp, skilful and knowledgeable and he and his colleagues had really enjoyed the weekend teaching human rights and working with people who have come all the way from Europe, USA and Australia. Some of the tutors remarked that it was an opportunity for them to learn more about the problems and prospects of human rights of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION FORMS, INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS

Evaluation Forms

Twenty-nine evaluation forms were returned. The participants were asked to rate their views on the organisation and usefulness of the seminar. The table below shows the analysis of the Evaluation Forms. Overall, the participants have felt that the seminar was organised well and has achieved its objectives. However, one participant felt that except for the meals, the seminar was a waste of time and it was not at all useful to him. Another participant had similar views, as there was no focus on Sri Lanka. He felt that Tamils should have conducted the workshops and lectures.

Table: Analysis of Evaluation Forms

RATINGS	1	2	3	4
	←		→	-
Choice of Venue	3	12	14	0
Time selected	8	13	7	1
Seating arrangements	1	13	12	2
Heating and Lighting	5	15	8	1
Visual presentation	5	15	9	0
Speakers	8	13	6	2
Topics chosen	6	21	0	2
The facilitator	16	9	3	1
Refreshment served	18	6	5	0
Usefulness of the Seminar	5	15	8	1

1= Very Good/Ideal/Very Appropriate; 2= Good/Appropriate; 3= Satisfactory; 4= Bad/Poor

Responses from face to face interviews and discussions

The participants were asked to express their views in greater detail on the organisation and usefulness of such educational programmes and the way forward in creating greater awareness of human rights promotion and protection. Almost everyone said that the seminar

was a valuable experience to him or her and we should have similar sessions on regular basis. Following were the expressions of the participants:

"I am pleased that I have attended the seminar. Now I have some idea of the way the UN and other agencies work".

"I have gained a lot. Looking forward to follow up programmes".

"I found the seminar very useful. It gave me knowledge of how Amnesty works".

"Excellent effort. It was very useful".

"Very interesting, very valuable seminar. I achieved far beyond what I expected".

"We now need to put the ideas into practice".

"We need to have more workshops and training on regular basis. Specific issues such as women issues, right to self determination, European commission, media work, campaigning and lobby, censorship etc. need to be looked at in more detail".

"The seminar has really made me to think what we should do to promote our cause".

"We must have workshops on matters concerning human rights of the Tamil people. There was not enough time to discuss this".

"TIC should have invited the Sri Lankan researcher at the Amnesty International to attend the seminar".

"The idea of issuing a certificate to the participants is very good. It will be a good encouragement".

"The seminar had given all of us a unique opportunity to meet the various people working on human rights from different countries. We need to have more such meetings. It will help in sharing of experiences and co-ordinate activities".

"I don't know about human rights, but I really enjoyed the weekend".

"Thanks for the opportunity".

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report endorses the view that there is much interest in learning about human rights and their promotion. There is further work to be done in human rights education and co-ordination of activities.

This report makes the following recommendations:

1.Targeting the community

It is important to encourage as many individuals as possible to participate in human rights education programmes. This means organising regular seminars, workshops and specialised training sessions and generally keeping the community informed of the human rights educational activities in the UK and other countries.

2.Co-ordination and Consultation

There needs to be close consultation and co-ordination between the organisations and groups involved in human rights work. This means establishing a mechanism to – (a) facilitate exchange of information and documentation; (b) provide a forum for exchange of views, opinions and sharing experiences (c) provide advice and assistance in human rights promotion and protection work; (d) develop skills and expertise to deal with human rights concerns and (e) identify resources for human rights education, training and promotion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Alaga & Co. Solicitors, Western Jewellers and Hari Food & Wine Ltd for sponsoring the seminar.
- Master Mugunthan Balasekaram and Master Saravanan Ananthathiyagar for the excellent musical performance.
- Mrs Shyla Visahan, Mrs Manimekalai Nageswaran, Mrs Sakunthala Poopalasingam, Mr Sivalingam and Mr. Yogan for providing support and shoulders to rely on for the organisation and administration.

Tamil Information Centre

Weekend Seminar - Participants List

No	NAME		COUNTRY
1	Ana Pararajasingam		Australia
2	Anton Porajah, Mrs - Female		Switzerland
3	Arumainayagam		Holland
4	Balamanoharan		Denmark
5	Baskaran		Norway
6	Deidrey Mc Connel - Female		Uk
7	Fransis Xavier		France
8	Giritharan Thana		UK
9	Helena Whall - Female		UK
10	James Karan		UK
11	Joseph, S J		Uk
12	Kankeyamoorthy, T		Germany
13	Kirubaharan, S V		France
14	Mathura, Ms - Female		Uk
15	Nirmalarajan		Germany
16	Peripanayagam, Mrs - Female		UK
17	Poonkothai, V Mrs - Female		UK
18	Popalasingam		Denmark
19	Rama Chandran		UK
20	Ranjith		UK
21	Revati Somasuntharam - Female		France
22	Rudrakumaran, V		USA
23	Selvarajah, A, Ms. - Female		UK
24	Shantheepan		UK
25	Sithamparapillai, C		UK
26	Sivanayagam, S		UK
27	Sivanesan		Germany
28	Sivarajasingham		Germany
29	Somaskanthan		Germany
30	Subajini, N, Ms - Female		France
31	Suthakaran		UK
32	Thirukumar		Switzerland
33	Vijayapalan, M V		Uk
34	Visvanathan		USA
	AI Staff / Subject specialists		
A	Dan Jones		
B	Susan Leigh		
C	Richard Bunting		
D	OMAR Alasow		
F	Karima Bennoune		

TAMIL INFORMATION CENTRE**WEEKEND SEMINAR****INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS
AND HOW TO USE THEM**

A participatory weekend with Amnesty International looking at international human rights instruments and humanitarian law organised by the Tamil Information Centre.

Dates: Saturday, 13th. and Sunday, 14th. September 1997

Venue: Little Ilford Youth Centre, Rectory Road, London E12

TIME	SATURDAY 13 SEPTEMBER	SUNDAY 14 SEPTEMBER
10.30	<p>Introductions Warm up EXERCISE What are human rights? FILM UDHR ICCPR ICESCR The UN mechanisms: The UN Human Rights Committee, the Sub-commission. Special Rapporteurs. Working Groups LECTURETTE <i>Dan Jones, Amnesty International</i></p>	<p>The UN Human Rights Commission in action LECTURETTE AND EXERCISE Other Rights and other mechanisms Women's rights The ILO, ESC rights LECTURETTE</p>
11.45	TEA BREAK	TEA BREAK
12.00	<p>Amnesty International- a human rights NGO LECTURETTE AND QUESTIONS An Amnesty researcher how she works: making a complaint. Campaigning methods using the international machinery Is this a case for Amnesty? EXERCISE <i>Susan Leigh, Colombian researcher</i></p>	<p>Media work How to get into the news LECTURETTE <i>Richard Bunting, Amnesty International Press Office</i> EXERCISE</p>
1.30	LUNCH	LUNCH
2.30	<p>The Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law LECTURETTE AND EXERCISE <i>OMAR Alasow, University of Essex</i> <i>Human Rights Centre</i></p>	<p>Developments in refugee law and asylum practice in Europe FILM, LECTURETTE AND DISCUSSION <i>Jill Rutter, Refugee Council</i></p>
3.45	TEA BREAK	TEA BREAK
4.00	<p>The UN Torture Convention Taking up a complaint - Bringing torturers to book. <i>Karima Bennoune, AI Legal office</i> EXERCISE</p>	<p>lobbying your MP on a refugee issue EXERCISE <i>Dan Jones & Sad Rehman</i></p>
5.30	CLOSE	Summing up. Conclusion
6.30		Light entertainment and Dinner



CENTRE TAMOUL POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME
தமிழர் மனித உரிமைகள் மையம்
TAMIL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

17th September 1997

Mr. V. Varadakumar,
Tamil Information Centre,
720, Romford Road,
London E12 6BT,
U.K.

Dear Mr. Varadakumar,

On behalf of the Tamil Centre for Human Rights - France and its branches in other countries, the participants and myself, wish to convey to you our sincere thanks for lively reception that you have accorded us during our participation in the two-day Seminar organised by the TIC and conducted by Amnesty International.

We greatly appreciate the manner in which we were assisted during the course of the Seminar, and it was a great pleasure to meet various members of the Tamil community and other well-wishers from the European community.

Needless to say, the Seminar was of very great assistance for all to learn and appreciate the work performed by the Amnesty International, and TIC have been the catalyst who brought this force in order to enlighten our knowledge and experience.

We would like to request you to organise similar Seminars, but of course on a larger scale, at regular intervals so that the valuable information that is made available through this medium of an intimate informal gathering could be put to its utmost assistance in meeting the day-to-day needs of our people in the Island of Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world.

Once again, I thank you, Mr. Sivagnanam and other helpers sincerely for all the assistance given to us during the Seminar and the wonderful musical treat followed by a delicious dinner at the end of the Seminar.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

S. V. Kirubakaran,
General Secretary