



Newsletter from Sri Lanka

for the year of 2019

March 2020

Providence Welfare Services



Dear Friends, Family and Sisters,

It is with joy and gratefulness that we write this letter to give some news about our projects and activities. Before doing this, here some news about our country.

Country background

- Population 21.2 million
- Area 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq miles)
- Major languages Sinhala, Tamil, English
- Major religions Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity
- Life expectancy 72 years (men), 78 years (women)
- Currency Sri Lankan rupee

Political News

Gotabaya Rajapaksa is the latest member of a powerful Sinhalese Buddhist political dynasty to hold high office in Sri Lanka - his elder brother Mahinda served two terms as President. He was elected as the country's President in November 2019, in the wake of the Easter bomb blasts in April of 2019.

Gotabaya came to prominence as his brother's defence chief in 2009, when he won much of the credit for bringing the civil war to an end. However, Sri Lanka's Tamil, Muslim and Hindu communities overwhelmingly voted for his opponent Sajith Premadasa, and the new President faces a challenge in uniting his country.

Context

Following 30 years of civil war that ended in 2009, the economy of Sri Lanka grew at an average 5.6 percent during the period of 2010-2019, reflecting a peace dividend and a determined policy thrust towards reconstruction and growth; although growth slowed down in the last few years. Growth is estimated to have been 2.6 percent in 2019, an 18-year low, partly explained by the impact of the April terrorist attacks.

The economy is transitioning from a predominantly rural-based economy towards a more urbanized economy oriented around manufacturing and services. Extreme poverty is rare and concentrated in some geographical pockets; however, a relatively large share of the population subsists on slightly more than the poverty line.

However, all these plans and economic activities were catastrophically disrupted that fateful Easter Sunday of April 2019, when co-ordinated terrorist attacks were carried out in several cities around the country, shattering the decade-old peace experienced since the end of the civil war in 2009. The series of attacks on three hotels and three churches in Colombo, Negombo, and Batticaloa cost over 250 lives consisting of both international tourists and locals, while over 500 were injured.

Tourism

A foremost and significant impact due to the Easter incident was experienced in the tourism sector. After achieving 2.3 million tourist arrivals and recording \$ 4.3. billion tourist earnings in 2018, Sri Lanka wanted to

surpass these records and achieve 2.5 million tourist arrivals and \$ 5 billion tourist earnings in 2019. These targets came amidst Lonely Planet's ranking of Sri Lanka as the top destination to visit in the year 2019. Tourist arrivals saw a dramatic plunge of over 70% after the attacks, forcing authorities to revise tourism targets for 2019. In August that year, the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) revised arrival targets to 2.1 million with the implementation of the free visa on arrival programme for a period of six months for 48 countries.

In addition to these economic sectors, overseas employment contributes highly in foreign exchange: 90% of expatriate Sri Lankans reside in the Middle East. Therefore, Sri Lanka's economy depends on foreign workers' remittances more than it does on tourism. Foreign workers' remittances amounted to 7.9% of GDP in the last year. Many of these are women who are separated from their families and are prone to abuse and trafficking.

Providence Welfare Services

Providence Welfare Services is the charity run by the Sisters of Providence. From donations received by benefactors both abroad and in Sri Lanka we aim to enhance educational opportunities for pupils from poor families, empower women and improve the quality of life of the poor, sick and elderly people. Here is a summary of some of the activities that we have arranged.

Women's day celebration

The women's day programme was held on 16th March 2019 at Irabadagama parish which is in the North Western Province of the country. There were fifty participants including young girls, mothers, grandparents and women of different ages. It was conducted by Mr. Sampath Wijesinghe, the Human Resources Manager of Citizens Development Bank. Through the use of video clips and games he helped the women to think about how to stand on their own two feet and to become independent, helping them to find their voice and to work together. They were encouraged to develop goals and to set up strategies to achieve their set goals.



Distribution of donations



Thanks to a local benefactor we were able to distribute supplies on the 20th of July to people in need in Nattandiya, Thabbowa, Kala-Oya, Kunchukulam, and Tewatte. There were dresses for elderly people, bicycles, dry rations, towels, bed sheets, mattresses, pillows and carpets. Towels and bed sheets were



reserved for the day for the elderly. Some of the materials that were distribute:

- St. Martin De Porres College, Lunuwilla – 5 bicycles and 4 dry rations bags
- Nattandiya – 10 dry rations bags
- Thabbowa – 10/15 bicycles
- Kala Oya – 1 bicycle and 10/15 dry rations bags
- Kunchukulam – dresses for elderly people
- Murungan – mattresses, pillows and carpets
- Tewatte – 10 dry ration bags

Celebration Day for the Elderly -North



The celebration day for the elderly of the North was held in Sinna-pandivirichchan on 6th of October with over 50 participants. They were welcomed by their grandchildren and they entered the Church in procession for the Mass offered for them. After the Holy Mass there was a programme for them and they were entertained with the games. Finally there was the distribution of gift parcels and refreshments.



Celebration Day for the Elderly -South



The celebration day for the elderly in the South was held on 28th October in the Leprosy hospital-Elakanda which is situated in the Western Province of the country. There were fifty elderly people. A music

group came and entertained the patients. During the entertainment they were given tea and some food. At the end each of them received a gift parcel.



Sharing the joy of Christmas with Tuberculosis patients in the National Hospital For Respiratory Diseases in Welisara

In commemorating of the initial foundation of Sisters of Providence of Ruille Sur Loir in Sri Lanka, on the 19th of December 2019 our sisters got the opportunity to share the joy of Christmas with the patients of the Chest Hospital in Welisara. After the Mass in the hospital, the sisters together with a group of young people went to visit the wards and sang carols making the patients happy. The hospital staff gave their total collaboration for this task.

The sisters could give 30 special gift parcels, containing most essential things for them such as towels, milk powder, biscuits, cheese and fruit. The nursing staff helped the sisters to find the patients who stay for a long period of time and have no one to visit them and the patients who have been neglected due to this illness.



Christmas gathering of scholarship holders in the South

During 2019, Providence Welfare Services have given scholarships to 50 students in the North and 30 students in South. Each student is being guided by the local sister who mentors the scholarship holder through giving them advice, helping them to make progress in their studies and through the way they have spent the money. Every year these children get together to share the joy of Christmas. This year also they got the same opportunity for that and the day was held on the 21st December. At the end they were given a parcel of school books and equipment which will be very helpful for their studies.



Christmas gathering of scholarship holders in North



On 4th and 12th of January the students who live in the North part of the island gathered together to share the joy of Christmas. One day was held with the participation of 16 students and nine parents for the students in Kunchukulam & Sinnapandiwichchan and the other for the students in Anuradhapura and Kala Oya with the participation of



nine students and their parents. There was a prayer service, an inspirational talk and the distribution of parcels of school equipment and books.



The Mission with the patients in Anuradhapura Hospital

One Sister from the Anuradhapura community continues her service for the Tamil speaking patients who have difficulty in explaining their illnesses to the doctors in Sinhala. She serves mainly in the renal unit in Anuradhapura Hospital.

The poor patients and their relatives who come from a distance have to find food, lodging, expenses for travelling and their medical needs. Thanks to the support of our benefactors; this sister has been able to assist them with these necessities.

Being a full time volunteer in the Association for the Kidney Patients, she attends to the patients who are extremely helpless and are subjected to continual dialysis.

Counselling Centre, Tewatte, Ragama

We are aware of the significant need to help the people who are mentally distressed in our society. In 2015 we started serving the mentally distressed in a small room in our convent and as a result hundreds of people re-started their lives and have better mental health today. It became clear that there was a need for a counselling centre, which is now being built in our convent premises in Tewatta, Ragama.

The building of the counselling centre started on 26th June 2018. At present the building work is done about 80%. The next stages will be the plumbing work and ceiling work. Hopefully we will finish the rest of the work as soon as we manage to find the small amount of money that is lacking at the moment.

The centre will help us to continue our mission and soon provide a space for those who have mental health issues, in order to give them a better quality of life.

December 2019



February 2020



Talitha Kum Project for Cancer Patients, Kotte



The project exists to support ladies who need to be looked after as a result of cancer surgery and treatment. The treatment centre is in Colombo and therefore some families have difficulty in finding a place to stay near the hospital when they come from other parts of the island. Our house is situated 7km from Maharagama cancer hospital. Other ladies have nobody to look after them during and after their treatment.

The people in charge in the Maharagama Cancer Hospital contact the Sisters in Kotte directly when they meet a cancer patient in such a helpless situation. We try our best to look after the desperate patients who have no carers, by bringing them hope, courage and consolation, irrespective of class, creed and race.

assistance.

Some of the patients have to attend and they are accompanied by one of year we will be looking at ways of by upgrading our bathrooms and We are very grateful for the of our benefactors that makes it possible for us to provide them with somewhere to stay, nutritious meals, medicine, travel, electricity and water supply



We provide them with nursing care and nutritious dietary supplements and render them spiritual and psychological

clinics in the hospital regularly, our Sisters. During the coming improving our sanitary facilities septic tanks.

financial support and generosity

Kunchukulam Community Poultry Farm

This farm is located in the convent premises. The demand is high for chicken so the Sisters raise 25 poultry chickens. They also raise up to 150 egg laying hens and collect around 900 eggs per month. The sisters are now experienced in hatching eggs and there is demand for chicks also. Two ladies from the village work on the farm. Their salaries,



medicine and feed for the chickens are managed from the income received from selling the eggs. The sisters also work the land surrounding the convent to provide crops and much needed food in a village which is far away from everything especially the local commerce.



The Sisters and the people with whom we work would like to thank all our benefactors, families and friends for all the assistance that you give, which enables us to carry out our mission among those who are the most marginalized in our country.

With very best wishes and prayers
Sr Chamila (Regional Superior) and the Sri Lankan Sisters.