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Colombo Roundtable: Climate Change, Public Policy and Humane Governance

15th March 2024



Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue

Mediation for peace

Colombo Roundtable: Climate Change, Public Policy and Humane Governance

Outcome document

On 15 March 2024, the Pathfinder Foundation (PF) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) co-hosted the Colombo Roundtable: Climate Change, Public Policy and Humane Governance to examine the interconnectedness of climate change and maritime security in the Bay of Bengal region, with a focus on Sri Lanka's experience. By drawing on expert insights, the roundtable facilitated a targeted policy discussion for decisionmakers and scholars to exchange views on climate security issues and identify best practices and potential confidence-building measures (CBMs) that can provide input to the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue 2024.

Douglas Devananda, Sri Lanka's Hon. Minister for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, delivered the keynote address. Launching the event, the Minister also presented to the organisers the new and recently drafted Fisheries Bill and sought recommendations, reiterating the necessity of dialogue forums like the Colombo Roundtable to strengthen effective policymaking mechanisms. Other participants included government officials, independent maritime experts and representatives of prominent universities and think tanks from Sri Lanka. The dialogue was held under the ChathamHouse Rule.

Participants acknowledged the progress made since the third Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue in 2023, including the adoption of outcomes at the official level. The establishment of informal channels between maritime law enforcement agencies (MLEAs) at the level of Directors of Operations consequent to the Bay of Bengal Tabletop Exercise in New Delhi in November 2022 and the issuance of the Kochi Declaration that provided the foundation for the creation of a Bay of Bengal Marine Research Network were therefore welcomed.

This outcome document summarises the key takeaways of the discussion and recommendations for greater regional maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal. The outcomes of the Colombo Roundtable will be made available to relevant governmental authorities and regional organisations.

Humanitarian Treatment of Fishers and Building Climate Resilience in Fishing Communities

1. Recognising the indispensable role of the fisheries sector in Sri Lanka's economy and the livelihoods of coastal populations, participants underscored the challenges posed by declining fish stocks and a lack of awareness regarding climate impacts within fishing communities. It was acknowledged that concerted efforts are required to bolster the resilience of these communities.

2. To this end, it was recommended that an enhanced welfare system be implemented, encompassing financial assistance mechanisms tailored to support fisher folk, including provisions for concessional access to fishery equipment, loan facilities and the establishment of an emergency fund to serve as a safety net during times of need. Moreover, exploring alternative livelihood options such as aquaculture and sustainable tourism initiatives emerged as viable strategies to mitigate the reliance on traditional fisheries.
3. Participants emphasised the necessity of integrating a bottom-up approach into policymaking processes, ensuring that decisions are informed by societal needs through consultative mechanisms. Furthermore, recognising the complexity of maritime issues, it was underscored that inter-agency coordination should be streamlined to foster synergy in policy implementation.
4. Participants expressed deep concern over the pervasive challenge of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, acknowledging its detrimental impact on Sri Lanka's territorial waters and marine biodiversity. While commendable progress has been made in enhancing the humanitarian treatment of Indian fishers arrested in Sri Lankan waters, participants highlighted that persistent incidents of illegal incursions by Indian trawlers pose significant environmental and socio-economic challenges. In this context, it was proposed that Sri Lanka intensify enforcement measures, including the augmentation of enforcement capacities and legal deterrent. Additionally, consideration was given to the declaration of the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar as trawling-free zones.
5. Recognising the transboundary nature of maritime security challenges, participants affirmed the importance of fostering closer cooperation and dialogue between relevant stakeholders, including governmental entities in Colombo, New Delhi and Chennai. In their view, such collaborative endeavours are essential for promoting mutual understanding and addressing shared concerns, including IUU fishing activities.

Maritime Crisis Management and Communications in the Bay of Bengal

6. Participants underscored the importance of strengthening maritime crisis management capabilities and communication protocols in the Bay of Bengal region. Emphasising the need for improved information-sharing mechanisms, participants welcomed initiatives aimed at enhancing crisis communication channels among Bay of Bengal nations.

7. Recognising the critical role of underwater infrastructure, including optical fibre networks, in maritime security and connectivity, participants affirmed the need for responsible maritime connectivity practices. Addressing the protection of such vital structures emerged as a key priority in ensuring the resilience and security of maritime communications networks.
8. Drawing from Sri Lanka's experiences in managing major maritime disasters, including ship collisions, oil spills and natural disasters, participants highlighted the importance of strengthening regional response mechanisms and fostering partnerships. Lessons learned from incidents such as the MT New Diamond and MV X-Press Pearl underscored the necessity of bolstering collaborative frameworks, enhancing information-sharing practices and increasing decision-making capacities at both national and regional levels.
9. At the national level, recognising the multifaceted nature of maritime challenges, participants stressed the imperative for Sri Lanka to foster better inter-agency cooperation. Consideration was given to the potential promulgation of national frameworks for maritime disaster response and the formulation of an ocean strategy as viable avenues to enhance Sri Lanka's maritime capabilities.
10. At the regional level, building upon the institutional frameworks of organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), participants emphasised the importance of utilising these platforms to foster regional cooperation. Leveraging these frameworks as constructive building blocks, member states were encouraged to deepen collaboration in addressing maritime security challenges in the Bay of Bengal.
11. In line with efforts to strengthen crisis management capabilities, participants emphasised the imperative of improving communication mechanisms and protocols in maritime crises. Proposals were made to establish a common centre for crisis management and coordination, fostering collaborative training modules and facilities, as well as promoting capacity-building initiatives for better preparedness and response capabilities. Furthermore, recognising Sri Lanka's strategic location and leveraging the country's experience in handling maritime disasters, the possibility of establishing the centre in Sri Lanka was discussed.

**Colombo Roundtable: Climate Change, Public Policy and Humane Governance
15th March 2024, Ivy Room, Cinnamon Grand**

Together with the Pathfinder Foundation, The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) seeks to host a roundtable in Colombo with prominent policymakers and scholars to examine the interconnectedness of climate change and maritime security in the Bay of Bengal region, with a focus on Sri Lanka's experience. By drawing on expert insights, HD seeks to facilitate a targeted policy discussion for policymakers and scholars to exchange views on climate security issues and identify best practices and potential confidence-building measures (CBMs) that can provide potential input to the Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogue 2024.

AGENDA	
09:45 – 10:00	Arrival of Guests
10:00-10:15	Welcome & Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Amb. (Retd.) Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairman Pathfinder Foundation ➢ Mr. Hemant S. Katoch, South Asia Coordinator, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
10:15-10:25	Special Remarks by Hon. Douglas Devananda, Minister of Fisheries of Sri Lanka
10:25-10:40	Group Photograph
10:40-11:40	Panel 1: Humanitarian Treatment of Fishers and Building Climate Resilience in Fishing Communities
	<p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is Sri Lanka's approach to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing?</i> • <i>What are the key humanitarian challenges faced by fishers in Sri Lanka, and how can these challenges be effectively addressed?</i> • <i>In the face of climate change impacts on fisheries, what measures can be taken to enhance the resilience of coastal fishing communities to environmental changes?</i> • <i>What role can regional collaboration play in promoting humanitarian standards and climate resilience in the Bay of Bengal?</i> <p>Moderator: Amb. (Retd.) Ahmed A. Jawad, Director, Pathfinder Foundation</p> <p>Presentations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Prof. Wasantha Rathnayake - Vice Chancellor, Ocean University ➢ Dr. Steve Creech - Freelance fisheries consultant and the Director, Pelagikos Pvt. Ltd. ➢ Mr. Hashan Wijesinghe - Senior Lecturer, University of Kelaniya ➢ Ms. Rasanga Kumarihamy - Research Associate, Pathfinder Foundation
11:20-11:40	Open Discussion
11:40-11:55	Coffee & Tea Break

11:55-12:55	Panel 2: Maritime Crisis Management and Communications in the Bay of Bengal
12:35-12:55	<p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are Sri Lanka’s key challenges in maritime crisis management and how can they be addressed?</i> • <i>What role do information-sharing and communication protocols play in maritime crisis management?</i> • <i>Are there lessons learned from past maritime incidents that can guide the development of comprehensive crisis communication strategies in the Bay of Bengal?</i> • <i>How can countries in the region collaborate to establish effective crisis communication channels in the maritime domain?</i> <p>Moderator: Dr. Sreejith Sugunan, Project Lead – South and Southeast Asia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)</p> <p>Presentations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Amb. (Retd.) Sumith Nakandala – Former Secretary General, BIMSTEC ➤ Rear Admiral (Retd.) Y. N. Jayarathna - Former Chief of Staff and Chief Hydrographer of the Sri Lanka Navy ➤ Ms. Dharshani Lahandapura – Former Chairperson of the Marine Environment Protection Authority, Sri Lanka ➤ Captain Prasad Vithanage – Director Operations, Sri Lanka Coast Guard <p>Open Discussion</p>
12:55 - 13:05	<p>Closing remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Amb. (Retd.) Ahmed A. Jawad, Director, Pathfinder Foundation ➤ Dr. Sreejith Sugunan, Project Lead – South and Southeast Asia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
13:05	Lunch

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Governance 15th March 2024
Ivy Room, Cinnamon Grand, Colombo**

List of Participants

Hon. Douglas Devananda
Minister, Ministry of Fisheries, Sri Lanka

Prof. Wasantha Rathnayake
Vice Chancellor, Ocean University of Sri Lanka

Dr. Steve Creech
Freelance fisheries consultant and the Director, Pelagikos Pvt. Ltd.

Mr. Hashan Wijesinghe
Senior Lecturer, University of Kelaniya

Amb. (Retd.) Sumith Nakandala
Former Secretary General, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic
Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

Rear Admiral (Retd.) Y. N. Jayarathna
Former Chief of Staff and Chief Hydrographer, Sri Lanka Navy

Ms. Dharshani Lahandapura
Former Chairperson, Marine Environment Protection Authority, Sri Lanka

Captain Prasad Vithanage
Director Operations, Sri Lanka Coast Guard

Mr. Attila Nasir
Researcher/Adviser (Political Section), Embassy of Japan in Sri Lanka

Amb. (Retd.) Bernard Goonetilleke
Chairman, Pathfinder Foundation

Dr. Dayaratna Silva
Executive Director, Pathfinder Foundation

Amb. (Retd.) Ahmed A.
Jawad Director, Pathfinder
Foundation

Mr. K. Balasundaram
CEO, MMBL - Pathfinder Group of Companies

Ms. Rasanga Kumarihamy
Research Associate, Pathfinder Foundation

Mr. Panduka Jayasuriya
Admin Executive, Pathfinder Foundation

Ms. Rumeka Perera
Programme Executive, Pathfinder Foundation

Ms. Shehani Gunasekara
Admin Executive, Pathfinder Foundation

Ms. Hiruni Ariyaratna
Programme Executive, Pathfinder Foundation

Mr. Ravi Jayawikrama
Media, Pathfinder Foundation

Ms. Farwin Hanaa
Interpreter for PF
Research

Nelson
Edirisinghe
Media –
Minister

Mr. Hemant S. Katoch
South Asia Coordinator, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Dr. Sreejith Sugunan
Project Lead – South and Southeast Asia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Mr. Chu Weng Lam
Project Associate – South and Southeast Asia, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue



Pathfinder Foundation is a premier think tank that has played a catalytic role in research and analysis aimed at contributing to economic policy reforms in Sri Lanka. Over the years, it has established a wide network of partner organizations worldwide, thereby enhancing bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote economic, social and political development, in addition to its security and strategic focus. Serving as a platform to engage in critical thinking and cross-disciplinary analysis, Pathfinder Foundation aims to increase knowledge and raise awareness of salient issues with relevant stakeholders locally and internationally.



The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a Swiss-based private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. HD's mission is to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation. HD uses the tools of private diplomacy to expand the space for the non-violent resolution of armed conflict. It opens channels of communication and mediates between parties in conflict, facilitates dialogue, provides support to the broader mediation and peacebuilding community, carries out capacity building work, and conducts research on mediation issues. HD deploys its expertise to support local processes that protect civilians and foster lasting and just peace.