



## Sri Lanka's integration camps dispel differences, bridge similarities

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A significant element of Scouting is peace, but for many years in Sri Lanka, this has been denied. Sri Lanka Scout Association is seeking to renew this hope by joining the Messengers of Peace project, to help young people overcome the longer effects of conflict, like prejudice, through a post-war integration camp among Sinhalese and Tamil Scouts.



Sinhalese community forms the majority of population, while the Tamils, who are concentrated in the north and east of the island, form the largest ethnic minority. Years of conflict denied these communities to freely interact, drawing them apart, especially the children.

The integration camp was designed to bring both communities together, through practical activities that would make them understand that their common identity far exceeds their differences.



Starting August 2011, Scouts in Kandy hosted the first camp, followed by the second camp in Kankesanthurai, the third in Galle, and the fourth in Jaffna. All camps were completed, one after the other, until December 2011.

Gayantha, a Scout from Kandy, said that after spending time with Scouts from the south, he came to realize that Scouts from the north faced many hardships for years. ?I now better understand the difficulties the Scouts went through during those years of conflict,? he said.

Another Scout from Galle said that ?even though we speak different languages, we sing the same songs in Scouting.?



Participants had team building activities and shared their thoughts on selected themes at the youth forum with lectures by resource persons from a university. The leadership concept was a new experience for them, where they chose their leaders and worked as teams.

At the end of each camp, they went hiking for two to three kilometers to visit villages and talk to local people from middle and lower income families.

What was most significant to many participants was sharing their homes with the visiting Scouts. During their brief stay, the host parents welcomed and treated their guest Scouts like their own.

With the camps over, the Scouts are hoping that reciprocal visits will continue and their friendship will grow.

