

(2017 Grassroots Fund Project:)
Harvests from Grassroots
One Step of a Long Journey
Janasansadaya (Peoples Forum)



Even after sixty-nine years we are still at the beginning of the long journey to achieve the goals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For the last twenty three years we at Janasansadaya commemorate the International Human Rights day uninterruptedly.

More than three thousand workshops, seminars, meetings, discussions, rallies, demonstrations, house to house campaigns, picketing, exhibitions were held throughout the country. Campaigns for free and fair elections and the Independence of the judiciary and fifty-two publications and more than a hundred thousand posters, stickers, and pamphlets were published and distributed. We have done a comprehensive study of all detention centers, about the justice system, and about the role of forensic doctors. We up to now have documented close to five thousand cases of violations by all state sectors, one hundred and ninety Supreme Court Judgments, and frequent torture methods, etc.



As an organization mainly focusing on eradicating torture and other cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment, we act to minimize torture by intervening using available mechanisms with the victims or their kin. Without any prejudices, we intervene to obtain redress of all categories of violations by the State.

As a human rights organization, we strongly

uphold the value of the Rule of Law and are committed to fight for peace, democracy, notational harmony among all ethnic groups and believers whether they are the majority or minority.

The 2017 Human Rights Day commemoration, which was supported by the Grassroots Project Fund, had four discussions with the most vulnerable sectors. Discussions held with sex workers, generally branded as prostitutes, enabled us to understand how in the name of law enforcement, especially the police, sex workers are exploited and in the judiciary how inhumanly they were treated. The discussions divulged situations of trafficking of women and young girls and about the underground organized promoters and brokers engaged in the modern sex slavery in Sri Lanka.



The Kaffir ethnic group residing in the Puttalam District who speak Sinhala and have intermarried with the Sinhalese are Catholics. They descend from African slaves brought down by the Portuguese in the 16th century. They have equal rights but face all the evils of society when the Rule of Law breaks down. Their struggle is to preserve their identity, culture, and language.

The Adivasi (aboriginals) known as “Veddas”, apart from the challenges they are facing as an endangered minority, are subject to all the irregularities and corruption of the state institutions. One whole day of discussions held with forty Adivasi community members at Danbana revealed how they were being exploited by the bureaucracy. The women who participated explain how they were harassed by the police and judicial staff.

After twenty three years experience, we realize that without empowering vulnerable sectors of society it is impossible to mobilize them to gain their due rights. In Sri Lanka we have laws, rules, and regulations. But the embedded corruption, combined with impunity, overrules the Rule of Law by the Rule of Man. In this scenario our successful experience shows that if victims can challenge the perpetrators within the “available legal frame work” without fear, they were able to achieve justice.

We completed one most essential tool, a hand book for Human Rights activists and defenders by compiling basic rights, rules, regulations, and applications under 98 topics with 16 annexes. All the rights, rules, regulations, and applications are described with an example.

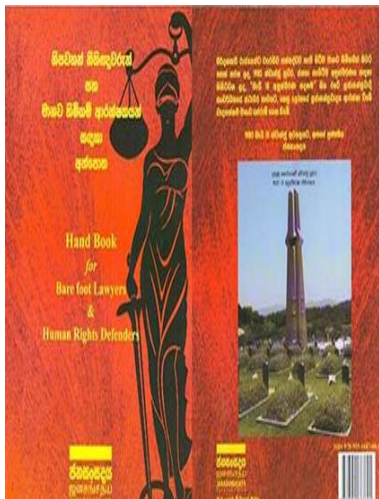
The hand book is dedicated to the May 18 heroes of Kwangju, who laid down their lives for freedom and democracy.



Forty six (46) persons belonging to all ethnicities joined for the December 10 Human Rights Day Commemoration held at Janasansadya Auditorium, Panadura. They consisted of fourteen victims who are courageously and fearlessly challenging the perpetrators for more than decade and a half to achieve justice and also Human Rights Defenders from Moneragala, Putalam, Galle, Kandy, Matale, Kalutar & Colombo Distracts and

journalists, civil society members, and activists.

After a brief self introduction by participants, the importance of commemorating the UN HR Day was discussed. This was followed by discussions on the present Human Rights situation in Sri Lanka.



"The Legacy of the Gwangju Uprising" documentary was screened followed by questions raised by participants, which offered an opportunity to explain the history of the democratic struggle of Korea and the role of the May 18 Foundation, committed to upholding the inspiration of the Gwangju Uprising, through the personal experience of Ms. Harshi C Perera during her internship period at the Foundation in 2016.

The Hand Book, complete with the assistance of the May 18 Foundation's Grass Root Project, was introduced to participants. The content of the Hand Book was described and how to use it in interventions was explained. The Bare Foot Lawyer is not only a Human Rights Defender and but also not a

Lawyer. The Bare Foot Lawyer is a change maker. The qualities that a Bare Foot Lawyer should acquire were also outlined.

At the end participants agreed to share their experiences and build a net work of Bare Foot Lawyers.

(The program was facilitated by Mr. Chitral Perera, Mr. Upali Magedaragamage, Ms. Harshi C Perea and the Janasansadaya Staff organized the program.)

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