



MEDIA RELEASE

The Youth Community Leadership Initiative commemorates International Day of Peace 2022 at MAS Athena



Thulhiriya (Sri Lanka), 03 October 2022: The Youth Community Leadership Initiative (YCLI), a joint programme of the National Youth Services Council (NYSC), in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka came together to commemorate the International Day of Peace celebrated on the 21st of September each year. In collaboration with MAS Athena, the 'YCLI Peace Day Celebration' took place from the 19-21st September 2022, at the MAS Athena premises in Thulhiriya, with the participation of over 500 young people from across Sri Lanka.

The 3-day event showcased a wide variety of activities for young people, including a special Youth Parliamentary session, a Peace Village and a Peace Fest providing a platform for youth leaders in Sri Lanka to engage in community action towards promoting wellbeing in their communities.

The first day saw representatives from all partner agencies coming together to sign the Peace Day pledge, to reiterate their commitment of ensuring that young people will be given opportunities to participate and engage in their communities. Meaningful youth participation is meant to promote social cohesion, sustainable development and community wellbeing.

Commenting on their role, Chairman/Director General of NYSC Brig. Dr. Thiran De Silva stated, “Having active youth involvement is very important for the development of Sri Lanka. In recognition of this, the National Youth Services Council have made reforms by giving more weight to young people in decision making processes and entrusting them with monitoring as well. We are also supporting the youth by introducing course curricular in terms of language proficiencies and technical competencies. We call out to youth to make use of all opportunities out there to learn and contribute to the community.”

The commemorative event is a part of the YCLI project that promotes peace, justice and strong institutions, whilst ensuring integration of health promotion, sustainable development and volunteer action enabling young people to participate as agents of change to build a healthier and safer Sri Lanka.

Speaking to the overall joint initiative, Dr. Shalala Ahmadova, Public Health Administrator, World Health Organization in Sri Lanka stated, “As signified by the Director General of WHO, Tedros Ghebreyesus, ‘There cannot be health without peace and there cannot be peace without health.’ This is symbolized by the many Global Health for Peace Initiatives (GHPI). In Sri Lanka, health has played a significant role in enabling social cohesion by empowering communities. In such action, young people take centerstage in utilizing their skills and talent to use health related interventions to strengthen communities. So it gives me great pleasure to witness these young people gathering together on this International Day of Peace. It gives me hope that the upcoming YCLI Interventions will promote health and wellbeing, in communities across Sri Lanka and its people.”

The International Center for Youth, Health and Peace hosted at MAS Athena was ceremoniously launched at the event. The Unit will promote sustainable peace, health and wellbeing in communal settings, while acting as a learning and development hub for the general public. This includes a Virtual Reality Peace Museum, a peace promotional digital game space, and a knowledge corner with publications, reports, learning materials, networking details and other resources supporting local initiatives for peace and health promotion.

Highlighting the importance of collaboration, Mr. Suminda De Silva, CEO, MAS Fabric Park noted, “We are honoured to have supported this event in commemoration of the International Day of Peace. MAS has always recognized the need for a collaborative knowledge hub, and worked tirelessly to provide a platform where people can interact with one another to inspire creativity and strengthen understanding. We hope to continue collaborating with partners to bring positive change in our society to create peace and development.”

The Peace Day celebrations further provided YCLI participants with an opportunity to utilize the knowledge they gained throughout the programme, and recommend an inclusive, sustainable and equity-centered national youth policy through the youth parliamentary debate sessions that was hosted at the event. Speaking to advancing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in Sri Lanka, Ms. Malin Herwig, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP in Sri Lanka stated, “The potential youth have for change and positive action is largely untapped. To promote civic engagement and active citizenship, we need to ensure that youth is facilitated in terms of opportunities and trainings to participate in their communities to promote social cohesion and sustainable development.”

Adding to this, Ms. Sharmalee Jayasinghe, Country Coordinator, UNV in Sri Lanka noted, “As the present and future of all nations, we must recognize youth as one of the greatest treasures of a nation. Over the years, we have witnessed how young volunteers have often been at the forefront as first responders supporting communities at the grassroots. Through volunteerism, UNV Sri Lanka will continue to support youth as they continue to inspire others to create inclusive and peaceful societies.”

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