



PRAVAHINI

WERC NEWSLETTER

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Into Year 2000.



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We focus on
★ *Creation of women's public image, their involvement in the political and public life through the media, training, publications.*

★ *Women's rights promotion especially among marginalised groups (such as refugees, unemployed, slum dwellers) with projects for rehabilitation and upgrading their lives.*

On the threshold of the new millenium what can Sri Lankan women look forward to? Where do they stand, what is their direction? Women in Sri Lanka today are forging ahead to take their rightful place as the other half of the population. At present they account for 49% of the total population of 18 million and early in the new millenium it is envisaged that they would outnumber the males. During the last few decades of this century women have gradually emerged from sheltered domesticated backgrounds to play new roles and occupy a new status. Demands of cultural and traditional norms had for long made them complacent and content to take second place to men. The elders of today look back, nostalgically some times, on their slow-paced traditional life style of days of yore the vast and rapid changes that have taken place in the recent past, in the lives of women. Today women stand very much on their own, nevertheless against a background of patriarchal attitudes which will linger on no doubt for a long time more and pervade Sri Lankan life impeding women's struggle towards an even march with men. Looking around, it seems that they have found their due place. It is not so, in reality, they have a long way yet to go but they are gaining pace. Individually and in growing numbers they have set the trend, breaking through into many areas which were men's domains once.

Education has been the tool that had initially brought women headlong into the move for more equal positions. Gender differences being minimal in formal education, women have made good use of the opportunities open to them. However in tertiary education including university Education a gender gap still shows up in particular courses such as in technological and engineering fields.

Be that as it may, as a direct result of enhanced educational facilities available to women a dramatic rise has

been evident in the numbers of women in employment. The workforce of the country comprises 37% women, as recently reported. But women are still concentrated in the stereotyped jobs such as teaching, nursing, clerical and factory hands. Though the majority is still there, there are increasing numbers in comparably new areas such as the security services, engineering, airline piloting, computer technology etc.

In the professional field women have steadily established themselves in education, medicine and law, facing equal risks and shouldering responsibility as men. Many women are heads of government departments and institutions.

It is encouraging that women are now going beyond formal education to equip themselves with managerial and administrative skills and thereby making headway in the business world. They provide a formidable challenge to men who held managerial positions as their special reserve.

But what of the rural masses, the poverty stricken women workers, domestic or house bound, women war victims in their thousands, whose woes remain hardly recognised. Their plight needs to be flashed to receive greater attention. As long as women lack the power to speak for women's rights as human rights, to raise women's issues and highlight discrimination against them they will remain in the periphery. Having won political freedom as far back as 1931 and the country's constitution providing against gender discrimination, women have yet to reach leadership and decision making levels in larger numbers whether in the workforce, professions or legislature. Here is the great draw back which hopefully women will struggle to overcome in the new millenium.

Sri Lankan Workforce and National Economy

A BOI news bulletin issued recently highlights the "magnitude of women's direct contribution to the national economy"

- ♦ Women form 49% of the total population of Sri Lanka and form 37% of the country's work force.
- ♦ 60-90% of the total workforce in Sri Lanka's three highest foreign exchange earners, the garment, tea and migrant worker sectors, are women.
- ♦ The three Export Processing Zones (EPZ's) viz Katunayake, Biyagama and Koggala have provided job opportunities for a large number of young women. Of the 93,000 total work force of the EPZ's 80% are female workers,
- ♦ The Garment sector accounts for 69% of total industrial exports with foreign exchange earning equivalent to Rs. 150.3 billion
- ♦ Tea sector accounts for 71% of agricultural exports earning foreign exchange equivalent to 50.3 billion.
- ♦ Migrant worker sector earns foreign exchange equivalent to Rs. 64 billion

Women Firsts - Congratulations !

Vice Chancellor – University of Colombo

Ms. Savitri Goonesekera having graduated from the Department of Law, University of Peradeniya, became the first woman lecturer in the Department .

She now goes to hold the prestigious position of the first woman Vice Chancellor (Colombo University) in the country . She speaks encouragingly of the recent introduction of courses now available at university, and the inculcation of non-violent and peaceful values to discourage group violence which has become characteristic of the university. "Ideally, students must be given the opportunity to think out ideas and reflect on them and evaluate their relevance to practical realities". It's her vision for the future.

President of the Institute of Engineers

A male bastion has been breached by the appointment of a woman engineer as the first woman President of the Institution of Engineers. Engineer Ranjani Lanka Hathurusinghe makes history taking over the reins from the men to lead the engineering profession into the Millenium. Having held many responsible posts, she now holds the position of Director Project Planning of the Mahaweli Authority.

Woman Power

Bhutan

Out of 40 new members elected recently at the 77th session of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Bhutan nine women members were elected. Although the law of the land decrees equal rights for men and women, traditional roles of women have kept them confined mainly to the domestic sphere. The women view the increased representation at national level as an encouragement for a future rise in women representation in the Assembly.

Kuwait

The 50 seat National Assembly held its first elections in 1962 with women pressing for their political rights. But their campaign received little support due to the interests and traditions of the Islamic faith and tribal groups. However Kuwait is the only Gulf State to have an elected Parliament with its constitution guaranteeing equal status for men and women. Yet the election law makes it an all – male poll even in 1999. But the Emir has decided to grant women full political representation from year 2003, adding nearly 300,000 to the voter's lists. It anticipates welcome changes in the cultural and social aspects in Kuwaiti politics, allowing women to become more out spoken and giving them the opportunity to address their own needs and demands.

Bangladesh

The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees gender equality. However in a citizenship case which came to the Supreme Court, it observed that in other parts of the South Asian subcontinent, including Sri Lanka, citizenship is granted on the male line. It is noted that the court had not recognised that the citizenship Act of India was amended in 1992 to allow both men and women equal right to transmit their nationality to their children and spouses. The judgement of the Bangladesh Supreme Court was therefore based on their statutory provisions despite the fundamental guarantees. The case is on appeal as the Constitution states that any statutory provision contrary to the fundamental rights provision is void.

France

The French Secretary of State for Women's Rights welcomed the move by the French Cabinet which approved a bill (Dec. 8) putting men and women on an equal footing at elections. It encourages parties to field more women candidates. Instead of setting quotas for women the state proposes cutting state funding to parties putting forward more male candidates. The bill is expected to become law in 2001 in time for local elections. President Jacques Chirac is reported to have said "the modernisation of our democracy demands that women take a full role in politics." The present government doubled the proportion of women in the National Assembly in 1997.

BOOK LAUNCH

"Code of Ethics for Gender Representation in the Electronic Media"

The launch of the booklet Code of Ethics was held on Sept, 7th at the WERC auditorium. Introducing the booklet, Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran Executive Director, WERC, outlined the work that had been done by the research assistants over a period of time and in the latter stages by the members of the Consultative Forum and the Drafting Committee, whose concerted efforts helped in the production of the booklet. She thanked them all for their contribution towards this first ever publication on the subject.

The Hon. Mangala Samarawera Minister for Post Tele communication and Media, was represented by Ms. Ishini Wickremasinghe, his Media Adviser, who read out a very encouraging message from the Minister. Present on the occasion was Mr. D.E.W. Gunasekera Chairman Rupavahini Corporation, who had also been on the Drafting Committee. He gave an assurance that he would make the contents of the booklet the basis of his presentation at the select committee level.

CIDA our main funders for the project was represented by Ms. Marnie Gervin who stated that CIDA was proud to be associated with the first ever Code of Ethics for Gender Representation in the Electronic Media. Commenting on its contents she said that it contains positive suggestions and practical guidelines to help the electronic media to see themselves as reformers educators and role models.

Encouraging and supportive messages were also received from the President's Office and the Ministry of Women's affairs.

From the Minister

As the minister in charge of the subject of Media in the People's Alliance government under the Leadership of Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumarathunge and the Premiership of Madam Sirimavo Bandaranaike, I welcome the booklet launched today on a "Code of Ethics for Gender Representation in the Electronic Media" by the women's education and Research Centre.

The Parliamentary select committee on the Media too would undoubtedly focus on the very relevant issues which have been stated in the booklet released today, and I hope that the eminent contributors and researchers to this booklet, have made their submissions to the Parliamentary Select Committee.

From CIDA

It is indeed a pleasure to be at this function which launches the first ever Code of Ethics for Gender Representation in the Electronic Media in Sri Lanka. This is a significant landmark in the history of Sri Lanka and the Media in Sri Lanka. May I take this opportunity to say how proud the Canadian International Development Agency is to be associated with the launch of this booklet.

In a context where there is an imbalance in gender representations and the increasing incidence of violence against women in society, the media is the most effective tool through which to counter these. The mechanisms which promote gender equality are already existent in international declarations such as CEDAW – the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women – which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1979. Many states have ratified CEDAW including Sri Lanka which ratified it in the year 1981. Sri Lanka has prepared a National Plan of Action for women as a follow-up of the UN 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. There is also a women's Charter drawn up. Although it is yet to be adopted by an Act of Parliament, in its present form the charter functions as a "standard setting" document which can be utilised for the benefit of women. Yes, we have the mechanisms in place but we have to build on them, work on them, promote them, disseminate them, utilise them and above all create platforms for them to be discussed. Need I say that the media has a great part to play in this whole programme.

This booklet says it all. Though slender in form it contains positive suggestions and practical guidelines to help the electronic media see themselves as reformers, educators and role models.

I commend the Women's Education and Research Centre for the important role played by them as well as their commitment to ethnic harmony, social change and last but not least the liberation of women of all communities in Sri Lanka.

Panel Discussions

Up to date panel discussions on the book have been telecast on ITN and TNL with a 'live' telecast on Rupavahini.

Dramatised Video Project

As an extension of this research WERC has produced two video programmes to highlight the negative portrayal of women on television with the objective of correcting this trend.

The two videos have been approved for telecast by SLRC for adults.

NEWS Bits

India Sexual Harassment

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that according to the Constitution the definition of Sexual Harassment would be as follows –

Sexual Harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication)

- (a) Physical contacts and advances
- (b) A demand or request for sexual favours
- (c) Sexually coloured remarks
- (d) Sharing pornographs
- (e) Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

This is a significant move in that it recognises that sexual harassment at work places is not confined to physical contact as an essential feature. Every such incidents the court has said, is a violation fundamental rights. Such cases they said should be examined in the broadest sense of the term and dealt with great sensitivity.

Punjab

Inspector General of Police

Dr. Mrs. Kiran Bedi was the first women officer to find a place in the all-male Indian Police Services in 1972. She became an Inspector General of Prisons (Delhi) in 1993. She took charge of Asia's biggest jail housing more than 8,000 male prisoners and transformed it into a model prison. She was awarded the Ramsey Magsaysay Prize for excellent government service in 1994. Currently she is Inspector General of Police in the State of Punjab.

Sri Lanka

Fire Fighters

For the first time in Sri Lanka an all-women fire fighting unit has been set up under the auspices of the SL Air Force. The need for a 'women's wing' had arisen when rescue operations or the ambulance service on certain occasions were found to be better handled by women. They recruits undergo the routine rigorous training and regular fire drills to become a service woman. Climbing up their high rise steep faced tower, training for the rope rescue team, entirely made up of women fire fighters, was a daring challenge. To become a good fire fighter a lot of guts, determination, daring courage and patience and perfect discipline are essentials. But the reward, the women say, is job satisfaction when you help to save somebody's life.

Madonna Larbi

A recent visitor to Sri Lanka was Madonna Larbi Executive Director of the Match International Centre, Canada. Match is a 24 year old organisation supporting the efforts of women's groups towards the empowerment of women and the achievement of the practical enjoyment of human rights, and works to build and strengthen the women's movement nationally and internationally.

Addressing a gathering of women at a meeting sponsored by CIDA on the positive portrayal of women, she commented on the media's role in responsible journalism. Gender violence, for instance should not be made out as sensational news, with gory details but rather as informative and educative interest for the good of society. Teledrama, a popular feature on our TV programs, has the capacity to influence audience behavior and should portray a positive picture of our women. She noted that it is still a very negative picture that is seen by the audience. A positive projection of women would show them as facing challenges successfully and as the confident up-coming generation.

The reporting of violence against women should be done with the purpose of eradicating it through public awareness. Much depends on the way it is reported. The media's role should be a contribution to ensure that a peaceful culture is built up in our society.

A New Trend

The main advertising agencies and companies in Latin America, Spain and Portugal met at the annual Festival of advertising agencies held in April this year. The new trend in advertising by these agencies highlighted men in more caring and sensitive aspects and women in more decision making aspects. These advertisements tended to promote sharing of responsibilities and equality of sexes.

At this festival the best non-sexist advertisement gets the UNIFEM Award. The selection is made by an adhoc committee of gender specialists and publicists. The festival is seen as an opportunity to promote a different portrayal of relationships between men and women.

(Media and Gender Monitors by WACC)

DAWN - ASIA PACIFIC WORKSHOP POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is an autonomous inter-regional organization of the South which acts as a net work and catalyst advocating alternative development process that emphasize the basic survival needs of the majority of the worlds people, particularly third world women and their children.

In this theme DAWN's concern is the impact of the changing economic milieu on the role of the state and on its capacity to face the needs of women or gender justice.

A workshop was held at Chiang Mai, Thailand from 8th to 11th October 1999, funded by Heinrich Bocll Foundation. Chiang Mai is a beautiful valley in the Northern mountains.

WERC was represented by Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran and Vinodini de Silva.

At the sessions papers that were related to the issues of examining the mainstream ideas and concepts related to such issues as governance, accountability and democracy and an alternative perspective that has a gender approach were discussed. Regional level papers were read on these issues.

The four themes discussed were,
Globalization and the State
Feminist movement, social movements and the state
Politics and power
Institutionalization of women in politics

There were paper presentations from all the sub regions of Asia Pacific. There were participants from

- Pacific - Fiji, Cookisland
- South East Asia - Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia
- South Asia - Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India

On the first day following the registration and the introduction by the general coordinator, orientation to DAWN's workshop on Political Restructuring and Social Transformation was done by Vivienne Taylor.

The participants were divided according to the sub regions -the three conveners for the sub-regions were -

South Asia - Vanita Mukherjee
South East Asia - Gigi Francisci
Pacific - Claire Slatter

The sub regional workshops followed thereafter. Issues for consideration at the national, regional level were discussed. The presentations of the inter-regional panels followed. There after an open discussion on women's issues and feminist debates on Political restructuring (PRST) and social transformation were held. DAWN'S response and synthesis of issues on PRST in the Asia Pacific were discussed.

The following day was devoted to Sub-regional discussion: linking research with advocacy of the women's movement: nationally, regionally and globally. A plenary presentation of sub-regional discussion followed. Lastly, a synthesis of the workshop was held.

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National Conference on Women and War

A very interesting Conference in Sinhala on Women Victims of War, was held on December 8th and 9th in the WERC Auditorium. Participants included lecturers of the Colombo, Kelaniya and Sabaragamuwa Universities, media personnel, NGO representatives WERC staff and interested persons.

The theme highlighted the fact that in a war situation it was women who suffered most. Supporting the theme with evidence the speakers considered different aspects of the problem. Research findings formed the basis of their presentations on the following topics.

- Women in 'Border' Villages
- War and Women of Soldier families
- Women in refugee camps
- Media Representation of War and women

The vast amount of firsthand information disseminated by the papers gave an insight into the lives of various categories of women who were victims of the protracted war in our country. Questions and answers generated interesting discussions. The final outcome was a decision to take positive steps to put out a press release to focus public awareness and to galvanise the public to realise the gravity of the problem. Action to effectively reach the attention of authorities is the final aim.





Mr. D. E. W. Gunasekera addressing the gathering (above) of Code Ethnic Book Launch.
Ms. Ishini Wickremasinghe (Representative of Media Ministry) is in the audience. (below)

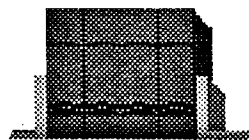


Women in Peace Building

A campaign of global interest with Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan as its Patron, seeks to achieve the following goals.

- 1) Full participation of women in all aspects of the peace process from village level reconciliation to national peace negotiations;
- 2) Mainstreaming of gender considerations central to post conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes by enhancing the capacity and ability of women's organizations to engage effectively in development and peace-building efforts;
- 3) Development of specific initiatives that respond to the special needs of women and girls in conflict situations and post-conflict reconstruction;

From the Book Shelf



WOMEN & WAR

Research Reports:

- Women & Conflict/ Vijitha Fernando
- Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impact of war on Sri Lankan Tamils/ Daya Somasundaram
- The Other Victims Of War/ Selvy Thiruchandran

Conference Papers

- Violence Against Women in Situation of Armed Conflict Conference held on 31 Oct- 3 Nov Tokyo, Japan

Journal Articles

- Civil War & Women of Jaffna / Stanley J. Tambiah Pravada Vol:1 No: 11, Nov 1992
- Tiger Women & The Question of Women's Emancipation/Radhika Coomaraswamy Tamil Times vol: 15 No: 12. 15.12.96
- Learning to live with Trauma: Reflections on Coping Strategies Of Sri Lankan Women exposed to armed Conflict/Else Evarding Voice of women, Sep 1996
- Women in Conflict Situations/ Kamala Bhasin. Option No: 19 3rd Qua, 1999
- Women in Armed Conflict/ Nimalka Fernando .1st Review Vol; vi No: 104 Jun 1996
- Sexual Violence & Armed Conflict/ UN Response Nivedini Vol: 6 No: 1 & 2 1998
- Internal Refugees in Sri Lanka: The Interplay of Ethnicity and Gender/Joke Schrijvers Nivedini Vol. 6 No. 1 & 2 1998.

NEWS CLIPPINGS, BOOKS & MANY MORE.....

- 4) Promotion and protection of women's human rights during conflict and post-conflict situations and making justice for women a central component of the peace activists to create new role models and new leadership.

(International Alert Gender Campaign)

YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Gorgia Reilly joined WERC in September as a volunteer worker from Australia and will be with us till December. During this short stint she has done some useful work with us and will be producing an important document "The Working History of WERC" which will place on record 17 years of its activities and progress.



We thank her sincerely for her contribution to our organization and also wish her a wonderful future as she discards her single blessedness !

This smiling, charming, hardworking Youth Ambassador says ...

I arrived in Sri Lanka under the banner of an "Australian Youth Ambassador", which is a Commonwealth Government initiative for young Australian volunteers to work in countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The aim of the programme is to assist with the needs of less developed countries.

My personal goals were to have a rewarding working and learning experience and in some small way make a difference to the people I work with and meet. I did not think it possible to fulfil this completely, but my experience at the Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC), has gone beyond my expectations and helped me to grow both personally and in my future aspirations.

Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran, Executive Director of WERC, kindly invited me to undertake a volunteer placement with her organization. I eagerly accepted the offer and came to WERC to assist in editing journal articles and researching and documenting their organizational working history.

Bearing in mind my limited time in Sri Lanka, I have gained some knowledge of the culture, the country and the people. I have visited various NGO's and my perception is that many NGO's are not yet able to fully utilise or understand the benefits of obtaining a volunteer. This is not the case at WERC, they are fully accepting and are open to learn, teach and benefit from the skills of a volunteer. They understand the importance of transferring skills and knowledge to people visiting from overseas.

At WERC they are professional and efficient, but this has not interrupted the 'softness' of the organization. As to me, the organization is symbolic of "woman" itself,

portraying the feminine characteristics of which feminists around the world advocate. They show strength, leadership, instinct, warmth and purity. On another level I see the 'mother-like' nurturing of all women. WERC sincerely want to see women's hopes and dreams fulfilled and to end their suffering and facilitate their growth.

WERC through their programmes and research teach women to live fully for the moment. Thus, releasing them from past oppression and paving the way for women to realise that happiness is within them, not in negative outward influences. WERC carefully guides and coaxes women to forge forward and strive for social change and expression.

I will return to Australia with insight into the plight of women around the world and in Sri Lanka, understanding developmental issues, having gained knowledge of Sri Lankan culture and the most important thing which was having the pleasure to meet and work with such an incredible group of people. The friendships I made here will not be broken over distance and I will stay in regular contact with all at WERC.

For me, I now understand that it is necessary to believe that the things we do can make a difference, and WERC represent this in their fundamental functions. I wish WERC every success in the future.

Staff Enjoys a Day Out

The annual staff outing was on Saturday 19th September when members and their children enjoyed a day of relaxation at Ranmal Holiday Resort on the banks of Bolgoda Lake. It was an intensely warm day but we soon found pleasant accommodation in an open hut built right into the water. The little waves lapping around and the cool breeze fanning us were really welcome. Before long, while some enjoyed snacks and drinks, the others were happily splashing in the swimming pool and had hours of fun. Having done justice to a well laid out midday buffet lunch, we were looking forward to the afternoon's boat ride. The boat took us out on a long leisurely cruise into that spacious expanse of the cool Bolgoda waters. As we enjoyed the fresh air blowing on our faces and the thrill of being surrounded by water, we were attracted by the spectacle of sprightly yachts in the distance with their coloured sails, engaged in competitive fun. That boat ride was indeed a most delightful experience and a fitting close to a care free day.

LIBRARY

For your next

Research, Article, Book, Speech
Resources

Books and Information on

- Gender
- Media
- Women's Studies
- Sociology
- Child & Youth
- Politics
- Religion

For quick reference:

Dictionaries/Encyclopedias
Research Reports
Theses / Directories

Special Collection on Women's

Writing in Sri Lanka

Documentation

News clipping on violence, suicides
human rights FTZ, Women, Traffick-
ing in women, migrant workers

Documented Journal Articles from
EPW Feminism and Psychology,
Rethinking History, Himal/Gender
and Society, Monthly Review etc.

Audio Visuals : documentaries and
Features and Feature films on women
issues, human rights, ethnicity etc.

- We have facilities for Reading &
reference work for non members
- Information through telephone or
fax.
- Computerised database for your
research
- Inter Library Loan facilities
- Photocopying at cost
- Computer printout of reading list
- Loan membership
- Reference/ referral services.

Video Film

"Plucking pays" a video film in Sinhala,
Tamil and English on Women and Ru-
ral Development produced by the Net-
work of Sri Lanka Professionals is avail-
able at WERC at Rs. 550/=.

Congratulations !

A decade devoted to WERC

Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran completes 10 years at WERC as Executive
Director. Her initiative vision and sheer hard work has been the mainstay
of WERC progress.

Board of Directors

WERC's Board of Directors recently welcomed two new members

Dr. Malathi de Alwis - Anthropologist attached to SSA

Ms. Rocky Ariyaratne - Attorney at Law

Congratulations to members who completed five years service at WERC !

Ms. Vinodini de Silva,

Ms. Dakshayanani Thurairajah

Mr. R. Bhaskaran

Warm welcome to

Ms. Mallika Manoharan - Documentalist and Research Assistant

Ms. Vimala Moorthy - Documentalist

Mr. Asiri Jayatunge - on internship from the Centre for the Study of
Human Rights

WERC Auditorium

For your next

- ☐ Seminar, ☐ Workshop, ☐ Awareness Programme,
- ☐ Film show, ☐ Meeting .

WERC Auditorium offers you the following facilities -

- ♦ Fully air conditioned
- ♦ Public Address System complete with Microphones and Ear Phones
- ♦ Overhead Projectors
- ♦ Translating Unit
- ♦ TV and VCR Facilities
- ♦ Magi and Flip Chart Boards
- ♦ Recording facility

A seating capacity of 38 available with conference tables and
an airy and spacious dining area to accommodate the same number.

Meals, Tea could be supplied on request

Special Concessions for Women's Organizations.

WERC Furnished Terrace Apartment

*Elegant, comfortable, quiet, separate entrance all facilities
available on lease for short periods for visiting expatriate scholars,
researchers, NGO personnel and the like.*

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