

## **Lawyers workshop organized by CHRD**

The Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD) held its annual lawyers' training after three years lapse on July 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018 at the Paradise Beach Hotel, Negombo. The two-day residential training titled '*Role of Legal Practitioners in the process of Justice and Accountability*' was organized with the objective of strengthening and expanding CHRD's lawyers' panel and while sensitizing and empowering young lawyers to serve their communities effectively.

There were a total of 24 lawyers including 11 females who participated from the North and East as planned by CHRD in order to ensure that victim communities have access to legal assistance and are aware of the present fluid situation in terms of justice and accountability in the current context.

Out of the seven resource persons (including 02 females), 05 were legal practitioners. The remaining two were strong human rights activists.

As for outcome of the workshop 90 percent of the lawyers agreed to be part of the panel. Further, they promised to take up cases on a pro-bono basis for deserving clients in their communities. As lawyers they were willing to participate as resource persons and consultants in trainings and legal clinics organized by CHRD taking place in their respective districts. They also requested to instructions from senior lawyers of CHRD and the panel while handling human rights violation cases.

Another important aspect of CHRD's objective to hold this workshop was to sensitize lawyers on the legal issues faced by victim communities in the post war context, and how the gap can be closed in terms of access and reach for legal assistance. Therefore, CHRD also made it appoint to invite the field coordinators from the eight districts of North and East in order that they may be able to highlight and emphasize on legal issues in their respective districts, as representatives of their communities and share their experiences in terms of legal assistance provided by lawyers.

Following is a brief outline of the two-day training:

The topics discussed were (1) Importance of legal profession in the conflict and post conflict scenario by Ms. Ambik Sakunanathan Commissioner, Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission (SLHRC); (2) Transitional Justice in Sri Lanka by Fr. Elilrajan, Human Rights Activist; (3) Impact of war and justice women and children – A gender perspective by Ms. Shreen Saroor, Women Rights Activist; (4) Issues and legal analysis by Mr. V. Puvitharan PC, attorney-at-law and CHRD Board Member; (5) Progress of Constitutional Reform by Mr. A. Sarveswaran, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo; (6) Victims participation in the TJ Process by Ms. Deanne Uyangoda, Attorney-at-law and Human Rights Activist and; (7) Why justice and accountability by Mr. K.S. Ratnavale, Attorney-at-law and Director, CHRD.

Dr. M. Ganesan, Chairman of CHRD, in his introductory note stated that CHRD work involves empowering communities from the grassroots' level to the lawyers in order to work for justice and accountability. He further pointed out as a psychiatrist to have success in providing psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery, the role of the legal profession becomes extremely important. From the work of the missing persons, nonrecurrence and land reclamation it is very difficult to fully recover in the absence of a justice mechanism.

Mr. Geoffrey Alagaratnam PC, Former President, Bar Association of Sri Lanka in his key note address spoke how young lawyers should uphold the ethics of the legal practice. He requested that the clients must be the priority of their work and they should be treated with dignity. He requested the young lawyers to make it a point to at least take up a couple of cases each year on pro-bono basis for deserving clients.

Finally, an open discussion was held by CHRD's Legal Manager and Regional Coordinator and a panel lawyer discussed ways and means to work together and planned activities strategically with the young lawyers and field officers.

While field officers raised burning issues in their respective districts, the lawyers explored as to how they could get involved. One such development was one of the female lawyers from Mannar attended the village level women's coalition building on TJ monitoring process as the resource person.