REHABILITATION OF EX COMBATANTS
THE SRILANKAN MODEL

Introduction

1. The Sri Lankan security forces fought against a brutal force of terror for 30 long years, and adopted a different approach with the end of the terror campaign.

The world’s largest rescue operation in living memory was launched with a strategy to ensure that the people will experience no longer the smell of death, destruction and desolation, but a future of hope, prosperity, peace and reconciliation.

2. When security forces launched the humanitarian Ops in the year 2007 to liberate innocent civilians who were held hostages by the LTTE a parallel operation was executed to ensure the safety of civilian who were either rescued or escaped from LTTE.

This parallel operation was conducted as per instruction and supervision of the then Security Forces Commander Wanni, who is the present Commander of the Army. Operation was planned for Three Stages;
a. Rescuing civilians from LTTE and reception of IDPs and surrendees.
b. Administering and resettlement of IDPs and surrendees.
c. Rehabilitation of Ex Combatants.

3. Receiving IDPs and Ex Combatants. An elaborate plan was drawn up to receive the IDPs and Ex Combatants adhering to the guidelines issued by the then Security Forces Commander Wanni.
   a. Ensuring ‘zero vulnerability’ of civilians to LTTE direct/indirect fire during the reception.
   b. Provision of food and water (immediately) on reception.
   c. Provision of medical care.
   d. Transportation to safe areas after reception.

4. Throughout the operation all essential items, were sent to the civilians in No Fire Zones and LTTE held areas through ICRC although the government knew that most of it would fall in to the hands of LTTE.
Further, the “Green Ocean” ship was launched with ICRC medics to evacuate patients including wounded combatants directly from VELLAMULLIVAIKKAL to the field Hospitals Pulmudai and Trincomalee during the height of fighting.

6. Separation of Ex Combatants. Keeping with the international norms and regulations, separation of Ex Combatants from the normal public was mandatory.

Hence, security forces requested all Ex-combatants to report to designated counters with the presence of ICRC. Large number of ex-combatants reported for rehabilitation willingly having a complete confidence in the Security Forces.

7. The first traces of rehabilitation began when the Sri Lankan forces laid down their arms to quench the thirsty, feed the hungry, nurse the wounded, carry the elders, trace the relatives, and brought the child that wore the cyanide capsule and carrying a gun, back to their parents.
8. **Need for Rehabilitation of Ex-Militants.** It is not a secret that by making the best use of issues on the slide, (Distorted History, Moral and Social Values, Disintegrated Social Fabric, Indifferent Perceptions of Communities, Brain washed Psychology and Remnants of unsolved issues from Colonization) terrorist leadership took advantage to remould susceptible individuals specially the youth to their liking to meet their vested ends.

9. The Sri Lankan model of rehabilitation for ex combatants was initiated, designed, developed and implemented by the Sri Lanka Army. This was specially developed and designed to suit the culture and ethics, norms and values and religious sentiments of Sri Lankans especially to suit the Tamil speaking people of North and East.

10. **Goals.** The goals of the Rehabilitation Action Plan are Three folds:
   
   a. To safeguard the Human Rights of Rehabilitees, Victims of the terrorism, the Community, and the State's international obligations;
   
   b. To contribute towards sustainable Peace, Reconciliation and Social Cohesion;
c. To increase the Employability of Rehabilitees and to create opportunities for Economic Revitalization.

11. **Principles.** These goals are achieved with a set of principles:

   a. Safeguards to Protect the Rights and Security of Rehabilitees, Victims, and the Community.
   b. Equality of Assistance.
   c. Gender Equity and Responsiveness.
   d. Confidentiality of Data and Prevention of Stigmatization.
   e. Adopting a Demand-driven Approach on Socio Economic Rehabilitation.

12. **The Challenges Faced by the Security Forces.** Out of approx 300,000 IDPs, 11,664 Ex-combatants either surrendered or were forced to surrender. These rehabilitees who joined the rehabilitation process were granted with a special amnesty.

   a. Under age (12 -18)  
      Boys - 363  
      Girls - 231
b. Gender
   Females - 2,033
   Males - 9,037

c. Civil Status
   Married - 4,167
   Single - 7,375
   Widows - 122

13. Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centers (PARCs)
Consequent to the separation of Ex Combatants from normal IDPs, they were accommodated at 24 Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centers (PARCs). Initial grouping was done the way they were collected for subsequent segregation as per their profiles. All PARCs were provided with:
   a. Making contacts with their family and friends.(High priority).
   c. Water.
   d. Sanitation.
   e. Food and Nutrition.
   f. Health and Psycho Social support.
   g. NFRI's (Non-Food Relief Items)
   h. Access for all UN agencies.
14. At these centers, a comprehensive study on all ex-combatants were carried out with Intelligence Agencies followed up with a dynamic Psycho Social and Socio Economic Profiling in liaison with profiling experts such as Clinical psychologists, Psychiatrists, Medical Officers and Counselors.

a. Psycho Social profiling
   (1) Age.
   (2) Gender/Marital Status.
   (3) Level of Radicalization.

b. Socio Economic profiling
   (1) According to the professional skills and education.
   (2) Talents and past experience.

Under these profiling levels of radicalization and talents and experiences were asessed. As per the finding of the profiling, rehabilitees were guided to undergo Educational, Vocational and Skills Development programs along with Development of Mental Tranquility, Spiritual Enhancement and Expansion of Moral Values to prepare them to rejoin the community.
16. **Use of Language:** Use of language was given the highest priority from the commencement of rehabilitation program to prevent continuation of the stigmatization on beneficiaries. Due to proper use of language all ex-combatants became Beneficiaries and all child soldiers became Our Children. Number of countries who are conducting similar rehabilitation programmes has adopted the Sri Lankan model especially in the use of language. This too was a special initiative by the Sri lanka Army.

17. **The Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Model.** The rehabilitation model designed by the Sri Lanka Army is implemented on six main areas with a special programme for the community.

   a. Spiritual, Religious and Cultural Rehabilitation.
   b. Educational Rehabilitation.
   c. Vocational and Livelihood Rehabilitation.
   d. Social, Community and Family Rehabilitation.
   e. Psychological and Creative Therapies Rehabilitation.
   f. Sports and Extracurricular Activities.
And the,

18. **Awareness Raising Programs for Religious Leaders and Community Leaders on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Ex-combatants into the Community.** This was organized mainly to educate the Government officials / Religious and Community Leaders on the rehabilitation and reintegration process, in order to clear doubts and uncertainties of the community, in accepting these beneficiaries to work together for unity and peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen, next I shall show you some of the rehabilitation programmes, Starting with Child Combatants,

19. a. **Rehabilitation of Child Combatants.** 594 child combatants including 231 girls voluntarily surrendered to the security forces for the rehabilitation.

Out of this numbers 273 including 119 girls opted to continue with the formal education. The Bureau made a special arrangement to transfer these children to a leading Tamil school in Colombo where they underwent proper formal education for one year prior to reintegration.
The balance including 112 girls underwent proper vocational training at Technical College - Vavuniya under the Vocational Training Authority.

(1) Programmes conducted for children are as shown on the slide;

(a) Formal Education Programmes.
(b) Vocational Training Programmes.
(c) Aesthetics/Drama Therapy Programmes.
(d) Spiritual Development Programmes.
(e) Counseling and Positive Values cultivation Programmes.
(f) Sports activities such as "Cricket for Change" / Regional Athletic Meets / Inter School Cricket and Netball Matches / Sports Meet / New Year Festivals.
(g) Guiding and Scouting.
(h) Educational Visits.
(i) Child Radio Programme of SLBC
b. **Catch up Education.** Special Educational Programmes were arranged for adults who missed the opportunity of continuing their Formal Education.

The Bureau of Commissioner General Rehabilitation with the Education Department conducted an accelerated "Catch-up Education Programs" for those who opted to appear for national examinations. Two Centers were established for this purpose;

1. Tamil Primary College, Vavuniya. - 382 (Male)
2. Co-operative Training Centre, Poonthottam - 154 (Female)

Results of these beneficiaries are as shown on the slides,

(three slides)

c. **Mass Marriage Ceremony.** Mass Marriage Ceremony was held on 13 June 2010 where 53 Couples were formally given in marriage with the consent of their parents/families.
Their marriages were conducted as per the religious customs, traditions and rituals by the respective religious dignitaries. Number of VIPs, parents and well-wishers attended the Ceremony including Bollywood Stars.

(1) The Bureau facilitated the entire ceremony including:

(a) Wedding Dresses - Sarees, Waittees.
(b) Flower Garlands.
(c) PottuThalis.
(d) Individual Wedding Photographs.
(e) Wedding gifts in the form of Rs. 5,000/- deposited in joint saving accounts.
(f) Bridal Dressing by experts.

d. Peace Village. The "Peace Village" was established to facilitate reunification of married ex-combatants who were undergoing rehabilitation separately at different Centres.

53 Couples who had the privilege of being the members of the "First Mass Marriage Ceremony" of Sri Lanka were housed in this village with a plot of land for cultivation.
These beneficiaries underwent rehabilitation and Vocational Training Programmes whilst living under one roof as a family unit.

e. **IT Training**. Fully fledged mini Computer lab with 30 computers was established to enhance IT related vocational training. This was declared opened by HE the President on 01 April 2010.

It has the capacity to train approx 100 persons a day. Over 1000 Ex Combatants has got qualified in IT through this lab.

f. **Pre Reintegration Mentorship Programme**. Prior to Reintegration, all beneficiaries are given a special 03 day workshop on pre-reintegration Mentorship covering important areas such as:

1. Diversity and Harmonious Living.
2. Peace Building.
3. Role of Man & Woman in Society.
4. Interpersonal Relationship and Empowerment.

(6) Assessment of de-radicalization.

g. Medical Rehabilitation. All beneficiaries were provided with special medical care including provision of Artificial Limbs, Wheel Chairs, Clutches, Spectacles and Hearing Aids etc.

h. National Identity Cards and Important Certificates. All beneficiaries who have lost or not in possession of National ID Cards, Birth Certificates, Marriage Certificates and Educational Certificates were arranged with a special programme in liaison with Registrar General's Office and Education Department.
i. **Drama and Art Therapy.** Special Drama and Cultural Programmes and Art Exhibitions were conducted to beneficiaries who had the natural talents in Singing, Acting, Dancing and work of art.

The Bureau created a special Cultural Group out of beneficiaries who performed extremely well and were gainfully used within all centres to convey the message of Peace and Unity.

Some members of this team have become professional actors and another group has developed a Western Musical Band.

The balance is working as a Forum Theater conveying different messages to the community.

j. "**Reflection of Transformation through Art**" was an Art Exhibition conducted in April 2011 using Drama and Art as another mentor for the beneficiaries to express their feelings. During the process of rehabilitation, such Psycho Social Rehabilitation activities demonstrated a remarkable improvement in De-radicalization.
k. **Friends of Peace.** Developing a musical band with the rehabilitees who had a good talent in singing and playing instruments is another important achievement. Training of the Band was done by the Sri Lanka Army. “Friends of Peace” performed at number of musical shows at many places including Colombo.

l. **Visits to South.** Numbers of excursions were organized for the beneficiaries to interact with the people in the south and the up country to understand the concept of brotherhood.

m. **Reintegration Ceremony at the President House.**

On 30 August 2011, 1716 male and 6 female totaling 1722, beneficiaries were reintegrated with a grand ceremony at the President’s House. HE the president Hon MahindaRajapaksha graced the occasion as the chief guest. Large number of Ministers, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Diplomats and government officials including tri force commanders were present at the ceremony.
n. **After Care and Monitoring.** Close monitoring on the reintegrated rehabilitees for a minimum of six months period is utmost important. Hence, Security Forces and the local Police Authorities monitored the reintegrated ex Combatants on a personalized fashion down to the village level. Simultaneously a comprehensive “After Care” programme is implemented by the government to substantiate the successful reintegration in to the community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, coming in to Lessons Learnt,

**LESSON LEARNT**

20. **Lessons on rehabilitation Process.**

a. The transition from an offensive force in the interest of national security, into humanitarian service operator with the end of the war made Sri Lankan forces stand unique in the way in which they embraced the role of rehabilitation.
It is heartening to know that Sri Lanka’s rehabilitation programme conducted by the Sri Lanka Army on the whole is considered one of the best experimented within the region.

b. Separating ex-combatants from ordinary IDPs was skillfully executed by the Security Forces, which subsequently led both winning confidence of the ex combatants as well as the IDP population.

Both groups felt that the armed conflict had come definitively to an end and that they could now be hopeful.

Rehabilitation was the pathway towards national reconciliation and nation building.

c. Well designed Rehabilitation programme by the Sri Lanka Army, which developed to suit the Religious and Cultural needs, Values, Customs, Traditions and aspirations of Tamil speaking community with respect and dignity helped to carve out a model of understanding diversity among the ethnic and religious groups.
d. Initial rehabilitation programs were geared towards opening the hearts and minds of beneficiaries helping them to both live in secure environment with enough time for stock taking and enabling them to rediscover their life skills and education. The majority responded well which was evidenced through their active participation.

e. There was a solid understanding of the needs of the children and the ethos was "let the child be a child". They were the first to be resettled with their parents. The overwhelming joy we have witnessed in this reunion of the conscripted children was a sense of “lost and found” for both the child and the parents.

f. It is obvious that the former cadres were indoctrinated with vicious and fabricated stories about the security forces and had developed a deep hatred and vengeance pronged attitude.
Hence, it was vital for the beneficiaries to be exposed to the uniform they were groomed to hate and discover for themselves that the military was there now to protect, safeguard its citizens and uphold the values of the nation.

21. **Lesson on Monitoring.**

   a. The Centers were sheltered only with 500 members for the close monitoring and identification of individual behavior and to assess their level of radicalization. This segregation made intelligence agencies to do their identification without difficulties.

   b. Conduct of Psycho Social and Socio Economic profiling, developed a system for intelligence agencies to monitor Ex Combatants during Community Rehabilitation Phase.

   c. Timely conducted community awareness programs cleared the doubts and uncertainties of normal public on Beneficiaries. This gave confidence to the beneficiaries to go back home, without any fear.
22. **Lesson on National Policy.**

a. Promulgation of a national policy with a separate ministry that fully understands the importance and seriousness of rehabilitation that is quick to take decisions is vital. Because we believe it is one of the key ingredients for the national reconciliation.

b. Introduction of aspects of rehabilitation and disaster management into the curriculum of Security Forces would be essential in the future.

c. Preparing highly trained civilian contingency to take the responsibility of executing the national policy on rehabilitation and disaster management is essential.

d. Sri Lankan model of rehabilitation of Ex Combatants which is initiated, designed, developed and implemented by the Sri Lanka Army should be disseminated around the world as a successful model to follow.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the final analysis, the Sri Lanka Army must be commended for conceiving, designing, developing and implementing a very successful rehabilitation model, which resulted in total reintegration of over 11000 Ex combatants to society within just three years, after three decades of war. It is a unique experience and a learning process to all Army’s in the world.

The outcome is as shown on the slides,

**CONCLUSION**

23. In conclusion let me tell you a small story. During the latter stages of the rehabilitation process, a Tamil speaking delegation visited few rehabilitation centers. They interacted with number of beneficiaries. At the end of their visit one beneficiary gave the head of the delegation this note.
A Thought of a Beneficiary…

We fought for the liberation of the Tamil people, we will not accept the same people pose a problem for us, In the future, we want all races of people to live peacefully, Stop the battle with the government and work for the benefit of the people, Releasing of rehabilitees gets affected by unnecessary overseas agitation, Abandon conflicts and work towards reconciliation, We know the pain of war. We will not allow our children to experience the same pain, If possible, work towards the peace and unity We no longer want Eelam from abroad,

P. A. N.

28th January 2011