

# *Peacemakers in Action* Podcast Transcript

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## More on Dishani Jayaweera and Sri Lanka (Episode 3) Transcript:

**MARK FOWLER:** Thank you for joining me for this bonus episode of *Peacemakers in Action*. I'm Mark Fowler, Chief Executive Officer of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. We're fresh off our profile of Tanenbaum *Peacemaker in Action* Dishani Jayaweera — an incredible force for peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. If you haven't heard that episode, I recommend you go back and give it a listen right now because this episode is going to dig a little deeper into her story and the history of the conflict.

In short, what we have for you is an extended conversation with Rev. Susan Hayward — Tanenbaum program advisory council member and the person who nominated Dishani for our *Peacemakers in Action* award. She has many other accolades worth noting, so I'll just let her introduce herself.

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** My name is the Reverend Susan Hayward, I serve as a senior adviser for religion and inclusive societies at the United States Institute of Peace and I am serving as a visiting fellow for religion and public life at Harvard Divinity School.

**MARK FOWLER:** Susan is not only an expert on religion — and Buddhism in particular — she also has a deep knowledge of the conflict in Sri Lanka, having spent time there while conducting research for her graduate studies in the mid 2000s.

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** I was curious about Sri Lanka because it seemed to go against the popular assumption in the West that the Abrahamic traditions — or Islam, Christianity, Judaism — tend to be more prone to political violence and so on than the Dharmic faiths — so Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism and so on.

**MARK FOWLER:** While in Sri Lanka, she started working with peacebuilding organizations and met Dishani, with whom she developed a close friendship.

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** I came to really appreciate the ways in which she was talking about the issues related to peace and conflict in Sri Lanka, as well as the the kinds of activities she was doing, the care she brought to thinking through the process of building peace and ensuring that it abides with the outcomes that you're hoping to achieve in that peace building work.

**MARK FOWLER:** So, let's turn to the full conversation now. The interviewer you'll hear is *Peacemakers in Action* script writer and producer Bryan Farrell.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** I just want to understand a little better — albeit briefly — what is the historic context for the conflicts? If you could kind of give an overview of how the roots of conflict formed.

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** I mean, it's Sri Lanka. It's an incredible, beautiful place with a lot of tragic history. And as you well know, it's located off the southeast coast of India and it shares a lot of culture and history with its neighbor, but also has a lot of distinctive indigenous realities that have shaped it. I think what's relevant to know for for this question — and to answer this question for the conversation broadly — is that it has a long history of multiple kingdoms that ruled it across the island itself, while also sometimes those kingdoms competed with kingdoms across the way over in India, including Tamil kingdoms from the neighboring, what's known today as, the state of Tamil Nadu in India.

So the majority group in Sri Lanka is the Sinhala, which is about 74 percent of the current population. And then you have the Tamil and the Muslims, the other two ethnic groups comprising about 15 and 9 percent, respectively.

So there is some historical precedent. Even before the British colonial period. It didn't start to manifest only during the British colonial period. There's this historical precedent for some competition between these groups within the island, between the island and neighboring India, especially between the Sinhala and the Tamil communities throughout ancient history, as these different kingdoms competed with one another. But, of course, the conflicts Sri Lanka has faced in its modern period, during the colonial period and independent period, are decidedly modern. They're manifesting and they're manifested by contemporary phenomena.

So Sri Lanka's colonized by the British in the early 19th century. It actually had some experiences of foreign occupation before from the Dutch and the Portugese.

But the Brits were definitely the foreign occupiers that stayed the longest. They were there for over a hundred years. They came in around 1815, and independence was not achieved until 1948. So Sri Lanka, or what they called Ceylan, fueled the British tea habit through its tea production in the central hilly region during that period.

And the Brits, they demolished the monarchy and they brought some elements of democratic rule to Sri Lanka during the colonial period while also practicing, as they did in other places, forms of divide and rule among its diverse ethnic populations that have had some lasting deleterious effects.

So, whether they were doing this intentionally or not we can debate. I think there was definitely some intentionality to this, but there were also some pragmatic reasons that they elevated Tamils, the ethnic minority, to a number of positions of authority within the colonial administration. Part of the pragmatic reasons for that is that there were a lot of English schools up in the north, the Tamil areas. And so there were a good number of Tamils who spoke English, which was the operating language of the colonial system. So Tamils were perceived by the Sinhala at this time — and I think in reality this was the case — that they were holding positions of authority that were more than representative of their numbers within the larger population, which created some grievances among the Sinhala population.

And then in addition to that, because of the kind of exploding tea plantations that were occurring in the hilly region of Sri Lanka, the Brits were bringing over Tamils from India, Indian Tamils, to be able to work on those tea plantations. So there was also a rising number, overall, of Tamil population in Sri Lanka.

And then on top of that, you had British rulers also encouraging forms of Christian missionizing activities or if not encouraging it, certainly kind of making it possible, making the space for foreign Christians to come and participate in missionary activities. And that fueled further grievance among an already aggrieved and disempowered Sinhala Buddhist population that's living under foreign occupation. So all of this together fueled a form of Buddhist revivalism within the Sinhala population. It was expressed as both a cultural and religious pride, kind of restoring long-held traditions and practices of Buddhism, of Buddhist ritual practice and meditation and these kinds of things, but also in civil society and political mobilization.

So a number of different Buddhist organizations arose during this time with something of a political social agenda as well. And then that all contributed to the development of the independence movement and ultimately the success of the independence movement.

So after independence occurred in 1948, the political parties that were ruling Sri Lanka — and this is perhaps not surprising — they began to form along ethnic lines. So you had Sinhala dominated parties that were dominating the parliament and the government, and they quickly began to reverse some of what they had seen to be the unfair advantages that Tamils had had under the British. Among other things, they passed something called the Sinhala Only Act in 1956. And that replaced English with Sinhala as the official language of the state, which made it more difficult for Tamils to advance politically and economically.

They didn't speak Sinhala, which many didn't. So Tamil politicians and the Tamil political parties sought through democratic means, the democratic process, to push back against what they saw as an assault on minority rights. But they were generally frustrated in their attempts to address this through the parliamentary process. Then you began to see a rise — and some different armed support for, and then the actual arrival of — a number of different armed movements within the Tamil community, who began to feel like “We're never going to be able to achieve our rights. and we're going to continue to face this kind of assault against our rights through the democratic process, through the state. And so we need to take to arms in order to defend the Tamil cause and even perhaps create a separate state in the north, in the east,” which is where a lot of the Tamil population lives. It's kind of seen as the traditional homeland of the Tamils.

So the largest group that eventually arose was the LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam being the name of the state that they wanted to create in the north and the east. And that led to an incident in 1983 that was essentially a violent assault against Tamil businesses and communities led by Sinhala mobs that was kind of tacitly supported by the police. And that is what is marked as the beginning of the civil war and a kind of overall support for this idea that the only way that the Tamils are going to be able to achieve their rights is through this violent movement that gave life to the LTTE.

So from 1983-2009 then is when you have this civil war that's taking place between the government and the LTTE. And in 2009 is when the LTTE was finally defeated militarily by the state and its leader was assassinated. And so while the war ended at that time, the conflict is still ongoing — in that the end of the war was not achieved through negotiations that led to a restructuring of the state and an address of the issues related to devolution of power, minority rights and so on, that caused the war in the first place. It was: The end of the war was achieved through a military defeat — and, if anything, a lot of the actions of the state in the aftermath of it only exacerbated some of those concerns. So there was a passage of an amendment that further centralized power in the executive presidency after the end of the war and in a number of other steps that were taken that really exacerbated ethnic grievances among minorities. And then in addition to that, you also have, from 2009 onwards, different new forms of inter ethnic competition and particularly sort of turn against the Muslim ethnic community, which in Sri Lanka defines itself as a separate ethnic group. So a sort of rise of anti-Muslim sentiment and forms of communal violence against the Muslim community. So conflict continues to be an issue in Sri Lanka, requiring the kind of peacebuilding work that Dishani and others are doing.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Thank you, that was such an incredible overview. I'm also wondering: Why did international interventions fail along the way?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** First, for background on this, there were from 1983 and until 2009 — the length of the Civil War — there were multiple attempts to try to broker an end to the conflict. The first involved India. India had actually been in the early days, the early years of the war, they had been supporting the LTTE in its cause against the Sri Lankan state. And that was in part because the state of Tamil Nadu — again, right across the water from Sri Lanka and India, home to 60 million Tamils — they felt a great deal of solidarity with Sri

Lankan Tamils in their cause against the Sri Lankan state. And they put a lot of pressure on Delhi to support the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. So India was buoying the LTTE with arms and with humanitarian goods, and that made it difficult for the Sri Lankan government in its efforts to try to defeat the group militarily in the '80s. So negotiations took place between the Sri Lankan government and the Indian government to create a peace deal in 1987 called the Indo-Lankan Accord. And that halted violence for some time and included some concessions by the Sri Lankan states regarding devolution of power and so on. And then India sent in peacekeeping troops for several years to try to keep the peace. But those troops actually became involved in violence themselves.

And actually, what's almost remarkable is that the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state came together in their opposition towards the Indian peacekeeping troops — had a shared enemy there — and they pushed the troops out. And at this time you also had an LTTE suicide bomber, a woman, who killed Rajiv Gandhi, the prime minister of India, out of a sense that India was capitulating too much on the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. So there was far less support within India for continuing to support the Sri Lankan Tamil cause and to be involved in the conflict in Sri Lanka. And so Indian peacekeeping troops were pushed out and war resumed. And then the next round of an attempt at a peace process was actually an internal one. It wasn't foreign mediated. And that was by Chandrika Kumaratunga, who ran for president on a peace platform and was elected in 1994 on that platform. So she attempted to do direct negotiations with the LTTE. It led to a cease fire in 1995, but it pretty quickly fell apart and war resumed.

And then you had the last attempt beginning in 2001, which led to the formal signing of the ceasefire agreement in 2002. And that was a peace process that was mediated — or the term they would use is “facilitated” — by Norway. It was a series of talks that occurred between the government and the LTTE. After the ceasefire agreement was signed in 2002, a monitoring mission was sent in order to monitor adherence to the ceasefire while talks continued. But it failed once again, and — somewhat similar to the attempt in 1994 — there was a sense that there was not progress, meaningful progress, that was being made at these talks. People were being flown to Oslo and to other places around the world and seemed to be enjoying doing some shopping while they were in these destinations, but there weren't really meaningful things that were coming out of the talks — and there was a concern that this was just being used as a distraction while each side was still continuing to engage in more covert forms of warfare. And indeed, you had a split within the LTTE that was occurring during this time that was being — if not overtly encouraged by the government — at least subtly celebrated by the government. So the LTTE was split among its eastern faction and its northern faction. So that led to a weakening of the LTTE. On the Sinhalese side, you were having a lot of nonviolent insurgency that was happening within the Sinhala camps as the talks proceeded. And there was a great deal of skepticism that was growing within the Sinhala population about the peace process. And then you had, in 2004, the tsunami take place, the Boxing Day tsunami. And I think there was hope for a while that this crisis that was being experienced by the Tamil and the Sinhala population, caused by the tsunami, might be something that actually brought them together because they would need to be able to work together — because it affected parts of the island that were controlled by the LTTE and parts of the island that were controlled by the Sri Lankan

government. So they needed to be able to work together in order to address the aftermath and the reconstruction and so on. And you had over in Aceh the example of how the tsunami did create a means by which those in conflict came together to address the crisis and then ultimately that buoyed them into negotiations to end the conflict there. That did not happen in Sri Lanka and in fact, if anything, the deliberations and the ways in which the reconstruction efforts were done post-tsunami exacerbated the lack of confidence and trust between the two parties. So, again, you had violence break out by 2005, 2006. You essentially had war occurring again, but there wasn't a sort of formal end to the peace talks until 2006 and then the resumption of formal war.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Jumping ahead, after 2009 when the war comes to an end, I know for the next few years after that things were still pretty tough if you were involved in peace building efforts. Dishani talks about that. But then in 2015, with the election of a new president, it's kind of been said that this government was a break from the past — more open to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. Is that accurate? And also why did that suddenly happen in 2015 after such a long period of seeming disinterest in such things?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** I would say, you know, so again, the war was ended not through negotiations that led to a restructuring of the state and addressing the drivers of the conflict. The war was ended through military defeat. And the president who led the military defeat of the LTTE, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was still ruling for a number of years after 2009. And he had little incentive to address the root causes of the conflict after the LTTE was defeated. And, in fact, the way in which he led the country, if anything, leaned into some of the root drivers of the conflict. So, again, one of them being centralization of power in Colombo, he passed an amendment, the 18th Amendment, that further centralized the power of the executive presidency. There was a great deal of politicizing of the judiciary during this time and undermining the rule of law. And there was a lot of crackdown on civil society and critics. That was experienced by both human rights activists and peacebuilding organizations like CPBR that were doing this work in local areas. And it tended to be kind of quiet work of relationship building, but that was nonetheless seen as a threat to a state that was increasingly showing a great deal of authoritarian impulses and agendas. So that's exacerbating a lot of grievances of the minority communities and of those who are interested in justice and sustainable peace, from all the communities, including the Sinhala. And then at the same time, you have economic hardships that were rising. So food prices were going up. The economic system was showing some cracks and creating some real challenges for people's day to day life. And then you had, as a result of a number of these things, some internal tensions that were happening within the main Sri Lankan political parties that were creating some splits. So Sirisena was able to come to power, kind of supported by those who were concerned about the authoritarian moves by the Rajapaksa, supported by some really prominent folks within the SLFP, this major political party who'd distanced themselves and split away from Mahinda Rajapaksa, including former President Chandrika Kumaratunga, and fueled by minority votes, fueled by those who were feeling some of the economic hardship. And he came to power on a platform of really addressing the root drivers of the conflict, of trying to undo some of the the steps that had been taken in recent years to further centralize power — but addressing the larger issue that was as old as 1948, the beginning of the state, and talking about issues of accountability for some of

the war crimes that had happened in 2009, but even preceding that, in trying to undo the 18th Amendment that the Rajapaksa had passed to decentralize, to dilute the power of the executive presidency. There was enough support for that that he was elected on that, and he created an alliance with the main opposition party, the UNP, and its leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. And that was unprecedented in Sri Lankan history to have this kind of a political allegiance between the two big competing parties. Right? So this would be like in the United States, a Republican and a Democrat coming together to run together.

And so there was a lot of hope that this was something different in terms of the political structure of this alliance. But also in terms of recognizing and addressing and wanting to address the root causes of the conflict. And Sirisena took some good early moves to create the reconciliation office and support some work to that end, doing some constitutional reform, conversations and discussions, creating an office of missing persons, which had been a long desire of civil society, passing a 19th Amendment to undo some of what the 18th Amendment had done. But, you know, ultimately, the alliance between Sirisena and Wickremasinghe, this inter party alliance, proved very weak and Sirisena himself didn't have a whole lot of experience in governance and didn't really bring some of the acumen necessary in order to advance some of these really difficult initiatives. And so the hopes that people had in 2015 quickly kind of soured because they weren't seeing a whole lot of outcomes in terms of the aspirations that had brought him to power. And then ultimately in this last election, the Rajapaksas were able to come back and have now secured the presidency again. So there's, I think, a lot of concern that some of the things that were happening under Mahinda Rajapaksa post the end of the war — in terms of further centralizing power and crackdown on civil society and so on — may happen again.

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**MARK FOWLER:** So that was Susan Hayward, giving us some background on the conflict in Sri Lanka. Now let's shift to hearing her analysis of Dishani's work with the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, or CPBR — the organization she founded with her partner Jayantha Seneviratne.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Just to kind of continue along with Dishani, can you talk a little bit more specifically about what impressed you about her? What stood out kind of clearly from the beginning, maybe even in comparison to other efforts for peacebuilding you were studying in the country?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** Two things that really struck me the most about Dishani and CPBR generally — Dishani, Jayantha Seneviratne, her partner, and the entire staff — was just the degree of heart and compassion they brought to the work that they did. It was so clearly about the people. They centered the people in building relationships of trust carefully with the people with whom they worked, and in trying to ensure that the work that they were doing was really serving them — to the extent it wasn't necessarily about, you know, having a million different workshops and doing all sorts of activities and trying to stay busy, busy, busy and have output, output, output, in the way that I think sometimes international donors

demand and encourage. Instead, it was about ensuring that the time was really taken to build the relationships of trust that could ensure more meaningful transformation and more sustained relationships. And that's peculiar sometimes in the NGO world of peacebuilding. So it was remarkable to me. And then also, like I said, the ways in which she sought to ensure that how she built peace was reflecting the peace she was seeking to build.

So what I mean here is that a lot of people will say that one of the core drivers of the conflict in Sri Lanka is the centralization of power — the centralization of power in Colombo and by the Sinhala Buddhist majority and a lack of devolution of power, decentralization, power sharing with those outside of the elite Sinhalese community in Colombo. And that, I think Dishani would recognize that as one of the drivers of conflict as well. And so if the peace that we're trying to build is ensuring this kind of a devolution or power sharing model, then the way in which we build it needs to ensure that there's power sharing being done. Those who are making all of the decisions about what needs to be done in order to achieve peace, how to achieve it, is not just Sinhala Buddhists based in Colombo, but that it is being co-developed and co-decided amongst different classes, different ethnicities, different religions, and so on.

So Dishani recognizes she is a Sinhala Buddhist living in Colombo, coming from an elite class, and she and Jayantha recognize that. And so they sought to ensure that they were modeling forms of power sharing in the decision making of CPBR as an organization, in the kinds of activities that they were doing. So even as they were building these interreligious networks of clergy across the island, there was always a lot of careful attention to ensuring that these clergy and these networks were making the decisions about where to go with the initiatives, about what success would look like, about what kinds of activities to do that wasn't for Dishani and Jayantha sitting in Colombo, and Sinhala Buddhists to be making those decisions. And that manifested in a lot of different ways. But it just stood out for me in remarkable ways from some of the other kinds of NGO work that I was seeing there and really trying to practice what they preach, so to speak.

BRYAN: You were touching on this a little bit, but how do you think the practices and principles of Buddhism show up in the Dishani's peace work?

SUSAN: Yeah, well, in a number of ways. So, one, with respect to values. Buddhism lifts up four values in particular that are called the Brahmavihara. But compassion and loving kindness are two of the critical values that are understood within Buddhism to be how meritorious action needs to be grounded in order to help achieve liberation. And liberation within Buddhism is understood as ending suffering. So to go backwards a little bit — and sorry, I'm going to become the Buddhism professor here — but Buddhism has this first noble truth that is the recognition of suffering, that life is marked by a great deal of suffering. And that's understood primarily to be about mental forms of anguish, psychological suffering, that we kind of create our own forms of unhappiness by our attachment to ephemeral things and our desire for ultimate security when this world can't really provide us ultimate security always, and so on and so forth. But it's also sometimes understood as the suffering of the world, as a result of human needs not being met and hunger and these kinds of material or physical forms of suffering as well.



So liberation, spiritual liberation, in Buddhism is understood to be an end to suffering that is achieved through developing right understanding and right kind of emotional health and connection that can reduce the forms of mental anguish, but that can also encourage a way of living in the world that reduces other forms of suffering as well for oneself and others, including material and physical forms of suffering.

So the way to achieve that spiritual liberation is through developing wisdom, right understanding of reality as it is, and of your own sort of patterns of mental habit and so on that are based in delusion. But also through action and developing habits of the kinds of actions that will reduce suffering for yourself and others — again, suffering as understood in a holistic sense. And so the kinds of actions that can help lead one towards spiritual liberation or the end of suffering need to be grounded in compassion and loving kindness. And it's these kinds of actions that, in a very immediate sense, can help to reduce suffering, as well as in that ultimate sense within Buddhism.

So I see compassion and loving kindness as very much grounding the ethos and the decision making and the actions of CPBR as an organization and of the staff and the team of CPBR, modeled by Dishani and Jayantha and the way in which they lead the organization.

And I should say as well, the other two Brahmavihara are equanimity, which can mean a lot of different things, but among them is ensuring that that one is responding to and acting in a way that isn't biased, isn't driven too much by anger or selfishness or forms of narcissism. And then *mudita*, which is sometimes understood as sympathetic joy or feeling happiness for the success and the achievements of others, rather than feeling forms of jealousy, which might be the more normal human response to that kind of thing.

So in other ways, too, I see CPBR reflecting equanimity and these forms of sympathetic joy in how they celebrate others and how they work with all communities in an equal basis, and how they attempt to work through forms of conflict when it arises within their team or with people with whom they're working in patient and careful ways.

And then where, philosophically, Dishani and CPBR bring to their work a really sophisticated analysis that is based on something like a systems approach to seeing that the work of achieving peace is not linear. It's not that you do one thing and lead to another and lead to another, and then we'll have peace, love and understanding. It's recognizing that you're working within human systems and state systems, and there's many different pods and nodes of people with different interests, as well as different infrastructural systems and so on. And the work of peace building needs to operate in such a way that it is kind of multidimensional and co-arising, arising in parallel and in different places and in times, in ways that can lead to a greater transformation and discussion. That's a very kind of Buddhist philosophical approach to understanding reality.

There's an idea in Buddhism called Pratītyasamutpāda, which is translated into English as codependent arising. But it's this idea that reality, as we see and understand it, is

composed of a lot of different constituent elements that are arising together simultaneously. And we navigate and move in the world around all of these very dynamic processes. And change is constantly happening, but it's never happening in this linear way. It's always a million different dominoes falling in different places at different times. And so to step into those dynamic processes in order to try to create positive transformations for justice and peace, you need to be able to both kind of see the matrix, so to speak — you need to be able to see these systems of dynamic processes — and then how to operate in multiple places in order to try to achieve greater transformation. And so I see in the decisions of how to operate, that CPBR and Dishani and Jayantha make, this understanding of a dynamic world and the need to work at the local level with individuals — and trying to create transformations in relationships, in mindsets and forms of prejudices or assumptions — but also seeing simultaneously the need to do the work at the policy level, at the state level, within the whole infrastructure of the Sri Lankan state. To be able to create transformations and understand that there's a connection between that work at the local level and the work at the state level. And that the work of peace building needs to be addressing those different levels in parallel and in ways that connect with one another. Does that make sense?

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Absolutely. It made me think that if the practices and principles of Buddhism really do show up in their work and make them so effective, how come they're still able to reach out to others from different faiths within Sri Lanka? How come it doesn't inhibit their work in that regard?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** So the ways in which some of those forms of the Brahmavihara or some of these philosophical ideas, a systems approach, they're presenting and drawing from it in ways that are incredibly inclusive and that then invite into conversation other religious and philosophical ideas and approaches.

Let me give you an example. When they were doing some work on reconciliation, they brought together the members of the Inter Religious Clergy Network, they put four words on a piece of paper in each of the four corners of the room: justice, mercy, forgiveness, and truth. And then they asked those who were there to go and stand in the corner with the word that they thought was the most critical element of reconciliation. So what do you think is most important in order to achieve inter-ethnic, intercommunal reconciliation in the aftermath of all that Sri Lanka has faced? Do you think what's most important is justice? Do you think what's most important is forgiveness? Do you think what's most important is truth, or mercy? And perhaps not surprisingly, it kind of broke up along religious lines and religion and ethnic lines are somewhat overlapping, not entirely, but fairly well overlapping. And there's reasons for that that are religious in some sense. Right? Because a word like “mercy” is one that resonates a lot with an Islamic worldview, you hear mercy a lot, and so that might be one that Muslims are more drawn to. Versus “forgiveness” is one that's going to resonate a lot with the Christian community. But because of the experiences of different ethnic communities, they might be drawn to one or the other of those words as well for what they think is most important for achieving reconciliation.

So after they'd all gone to the different corners of the room, they stopped and they reflected on the fact that there seemed to be a little bit of this divide among different religious communities. And they had a conversation about why and then talked about what an inter-ethnic, interreligious understanding of reconciliation might look like that draws from different religious values and core concepts that are critical to each of those religious traditions, as well as the needs of different ethnic communities.

So that's just an example of the ways in which I've seen CPBR really seek to highlight the distinctive contributions of different religious ideas — but also the experiences of different religious and ethnic groups — into their work, in order to try to co-create a truly interreligious, inter-ethnic approach moving forward.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** That's great. I really appreciate that example. So now I wonder if you could also think back to the time you were nominating or recommending Dishani for the Tanenbaum *Peacemaker in Action* Award in 2012. Do you remember how that came up?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** Yeah, absolutely. I was aware that there weren't a lot of examples in the Tanenbaum network of Buddhist peacebuilders. So I was eager to highlight that. And I was also eager to highlight her as a woman peacebuilder who's doing a lot of work with male clergy in her country, and in a country in which, frankly, women don't hold a great deal of religious authority, or aren't recognized as having a great deal of religious authority. And what I thought was: Dishani's remarkable in and of herself in the work that she does there and the heart that she brings to it and the thoughtfulness she brings to it. But I also thought she would be able to contribute to the Tanenbaum network. Both some of the distinctive contributions as a Buddhist peace builder, or one who comes from the Buddhist tradition, but also as an example of a woman who has been able to develop trust and respect from male religious clergy across different traditions, but perhaps most remarkably from her own religious tradition.

In Sri Lanka, as in a number of other places, but in Sri Lanka in particular, there's a great deal of deference that is given to clergy. The front seats in busses are always reserved for clergy. Lay people will bring water, bring food, will sort of constantly attend to the needs of clergy when they're in the room with them. There's a great deal of respect and deference that is given to clergy, a kind of big, noticeable power dynamic between clergy and lay people. But nonetheless, what I would witness in these sessions that I was in with her, is the degree of respect and deference that the male clergy were giving to her as a lay woman. And it was remarkable to me. They saw her as a teacher. They called her a teacher. And so I really wanted to be able to highlight her in that respect as well. And to be able — for those within the network and for the wider peacebuilding community — to draw some of the lessons from her model of how she's been able to develop the kind of trust and respect that allows her to be able to be in relationship with, and be seen with, and to teach, and to learn from clergy in that way.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** And do you have a sense of how she felt about being nominated?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** Slightly embarrassed and very much humbled and appreciative, I think what she was most excited about is the opportunity to learn from other religious peacebuilders for whom she has a great deal of respect — notably Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye from Nigeria.

And so I had spoken with Dishani some about Pastor James and Imam Ashafa over the years. She had seen the documentary about them and their work. And she was really inspired by their story of personal transformation and the kind of work that they were doing in their community — really thought that there were lessons that she could draw from that for her own work, that Sri Lanka as a whole could draw from. And so I know she was very enthusiastic and excited about the idea of being able to connect with the network generally, but Pastor James and Imam Ashafa in particular, to be able to learn from them.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Yeah, a part of the story we tell is how she brought them to Sri Lanka in 2015, just kind of ahead of the People's Forum that they were preparing for and how that helped push them over the finish line toward getting all of their recommendations and everything ready for that forum. Do you remember that?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** I do. Yeah, I do. And I'm grateful to her participation in the *Peacemakers Network* to be able to make those kinds of connections, because there's obviously a great deal that can be gained from these kinds of networks of solidarity and support for those who are doing the tough work on the ground in these really tough locations.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Did you closely follow what happened after the People's Forum in 2015, when they presented these recommendations and have any sense of what that ultimately accomplished or how that is even progressing still today?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** I don't know if I could speak in depth to that because I haven't been as involved in some of the nitty gritty work of Dishani over the past several years. But I was saying earlier that one of the things that's remarkable about them is the systems approach they take and understanding that the work that they do at the local level needs to be connected to contribute to forms of structural transformation that are at the heart of Sri Lankan violence and conflict — if you're going to actually have a sustainable peace.

And when Dishani was carefully building these networks of the interreligious clergy in 2008, 2009, 2010, she and I would sometimes talk and, frankly, I was sometimes a little antsy about “OK, but how are we going to ensure that this work that you're doing to build this incredible network across the island will actually be mobilized and leveraged in order to do some advocacy in Colombo, in order to try to address some of these structural issues?”

And she would say, “Suzie we need to be patient to ensure that the relationships of trust that are built between the members of these networks are strong enough to be able to endure that kind of political work. Because what I've seen too often is that these forms of alliances are built and then too quickly there's the turn to trying to do some of the advocacy and so on. But when there's not enough trust, there's not enough strong glue between the

individual members of the network. Then as soon as you get the the limelight for being involved in this kind of visible advocacy work, the scrutiny that comes with the limelight, some of the really difficult, granular political, institutional, legal decisions that need to be made around issues like centralization of power or accountability and justice and that kind of thing, that can destroy a network or an alliance. And so you need to take the time to build the trust to address things at a local level. Maybe kind of lower stake things first, have success there and then work your way up to be able to address some of the larger structural issues. And these are structural issues that have been around for decades and are very rooted in the state system, and are going to require a lot of time and a lot of energy and a lot of focus to be able to address and transform. And so you need to take time to do it right.

And so by the time 2015 had come along, there had already been years of doing this really careful groundwork of building relationships and building that strong glue in order to be able to begin to step into that more visible advocacy role, engaging with the state and engaging with the Office of Reconciliation under former President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who they were working with, in order to try to really create some policy changes moving forward; and not just in a kumbaya sense of inter-ethnic care and concern and respect and “tolerance,” but on power sharing and accountability in some of these really more difficult issues. And so, again, just a testament to Dishani's long term vision and her understanding of all the work that is necessary in order to get to an event like a People's Forum, versus other organizations, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, I see that jump to do those kind of high visibility events in the capital with cameras and platforms and statements and that kind of thing. But it can sometimes feel like theater. It can sometimes feel superficial because it's not necessarily built on the kind of strong foundation that Dishani had built over several years before she did that kind of an event.

**BRYAN FARRELL:** Thank you for that context. It's really helpful to understand just how impressive that was. And so then just kind of looking ahead, in the five years since then, how do you feel about where Sri Lanka's at? Obviously, there were attacks that have sparked some new tensions and so forth. But do you feel like Sri Lanka is in a better position to handle any kind of rising tensions because of all the work that has been done by people like Dishani and Jay and all the peacebuilding efforts?

**SUSAN HAYWARD:** That's a really tough question to answer, Bryan! Peacebuilding is a process and it's not linear, as I said earlier, and Sri Lanka's journey through periods of violence. And of course, there's the violence related to the civil war between the LTTE and the government. But there was another civil war in the 1970s and '80s that took place in the south, the JVP insurrections that were a poor Sinhala youth-led movement against the state that was violently put down by the state, that led to a lot of bloodshed. All the bloodshed related to the civil war between the government and the LTTE, the forms of communal violence that have taken place in recent years that have targeted the the Muslim community, the Easter bombings that targeted the Christian community and kind of the Colombo elite or Western influenced community in Sri Lanka — there's a lot to contend with. There is a lot of blood and harm and hurt in the soil of Sri Lanka and a lot of truth telling, a lot of transformation that needs to take place. And Sri Lankan civil society is

incredible. It's a very robust civil society that has been for a long time addressing these issues through various forms, through legal advocacy, through the kind of inter-ethnic interreligious relationship building that Dishani symbolizes or represents, through creative art forms, through many different ways. And the civil society in Sri Lanka's indefatigable, they'll continue to do this work. The the hard part is the state system, which has proven over the years to be pretty impervious to the kinds of transformations that are required in order to address these underlying drivers of conflict, and has taken steps forward and has taken steps back, and has clearly not been a linear process for for the state system to achieve peace or to address just conflict.

So I'm very optimistic when it comes to civil society and to their continued and sustained work. And I think we saw that in the aftermath of the Easter bombings, the immediate and remarkable ways in which clergy from all the different communities came together and stood together and supported the survivors of the bombings and tried to protect the Muslim community from vigilante violence that occurred in the immediate aftermath by some young young men. And I think that kind of immediate response is a testament to the strength of civil society and is absolutely a testament to the work of Dishani and the work of those whom Dishani works with, who have done that kind of careful relationship building and support to members of different faith communities and to religious leaders and to others to be able to respond in that way.

You know, you also see some of the ways in which the state and larger social systems have responded to the Easter bombing that is cause for concern. That is only going to exacerbate some of the drivers of conflict rather than transform them. So my answer is not simple. I have some reasons for optimism and still recognize that there's a lot that needs to be done still in Sri Lanka, as in America, as in a lot of places that have experienced violence, to really be able to deal with the ghosts and the hurts of the past and to transform the underlying drivers of ongoing conflict and injustice.

[closing theme music]

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Now for the credits:

I'm your host, Mark Fowler, Tanenbaum CEO.

This episode was written, edited and produced by Bryan Farrell.

Tanenbaum Conflict Resolution Senior Associate and series creator Janie Dumbleton, served as Co-producer, along with Tanenbaum *Peacemakers in Action Network* Coordinator Élie Khoury.

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