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**Meeting Human Needs, Preventing Violence:  
Applying Human Needs Theory to  
the Conflict in Sri Lanka**

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"[H]uman needs are a powerful source of explanation of human behavior and social interaction. All individuals have needs that they strive to satisfy, either by using the system[,] 'acting on the fringes[,] or acting as a reformist or revolutionary. Given this condition, social systems must be responsive to individual needs, or be subject to instability and forced change (possibly through violence or conflict)."

-- Coate and Rosati, "Preface," in *The Power of Human Needs in World Society*, ed. Roger A. Coate and Jerel A. Rosati, ix. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988.<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Violence is not human nature. This was the clear conclusion from a meeting of scientists in Seville in 1986.<sup>2</sup> The Seville Manifest convincingly argued that violence was not genetic, and was simply a social construct, an invention. Unfortunately, it has not been given much attention. One reason may be that it is more difficult to justify the need for war if it is proven that no-one is violent by birth, that there is no "evil", no natural aggression. Still, there is violence. In Sri Lanka, more than 65,000 people have been killed in the war which has been going on since the 1970s. Now, if violence is a learnt behaviour, why do we behave violently? And how can such violent behaviour successfully be deterred, prevented? Within international relations and peace studies, conflict resolution approaches look at these questions. Through conflict resolution, one considers the sources of conflict in order to address the roots of the problem, thereby avoiding or preventing violence.

One theory which looks at the roots of conflict, is Human Needs Theory (HNT). Often ignored and neglected by peace researchers, HNT may offer valuable insights into the sources of conflict, and thus possible resolutions. This paper will look at how HNT can be applied to a current conflict, the one being fought between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In its first part, the paper will be looking at HNT and some of its theorists, and then move on to consider the usefulness and the criticisms of HNT. In the second part, the conflict in Sri Lanka will be presented briefly and some of the main issues of the conflict outlined. HNT will then be applied to the conflict, to see whether it may prove useful in moving towards resolution. Also considering issues of perception, enemy images and lack of trust when outlining how to move towards resolution, the paper will finally conclude, observing that HNT could effectively give new insights into finding strategies which may work for both parties.

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<sup>1</sup> In Marker, Susan. What Human Needs Are. In *Beyond Intractability*, August 2003. Available on [http://www.beyonintractability.org/m/human\\_needs.jsp](http://www.beyonintractability.org/m/human_needs.jsp)

<sup>2</sup> Adams, David. Early History of the Culture of Peace. A Personal Memoire. Available on <http://www.culture-of-peace.info/history/introduction.html>

## **Human Needs Theory (HNT)**

In order to live and attain well-being, humans need certain essentials. These are called human needs or basic human needs. Human needs theorists argue that conflicts and violent conflicts are caused by unmet human needs. Violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their need, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs. Rosenberg states that violence is a tragic expression of unmet human needs, implying that all actions undertaken by human beings are attempts to satisfy their needs. If we are able to connect with our needs and those of others, we will therefore be able to look at other ways of meeting such needs, avoiding violence and destruction.

Often, human needs or basic human needs are confused with subsistence needs. However, such a view of human needs may limit our understanding of the human being to simply exist as a biological creature. Although there are conflicts over subsistence, most conflicts have to do with other unmet human needs, such as protection, identity, recognition, participation and understanding. Only by giving more importance to these latter needs, truly recognising them as human needs essential to the wellbeing of all human being, will we be able to address current and intractable conflicts. Our confused view of human needs as subsistence needs only is also in part due to the alienation of “needs” we have created in our society. Needs are often associated with weakness, and someone who needs is considered weak and fragile. This also further impedes the inclusion of needs approaches in conflict transformation and peace processes.

There are various individuals who have applied human needs theory. Here, the proposals of Abraham Maslow, John Burton, Marshall Rosenberg and Manfred Max-Neef will briefly be explored.

In his Pyramid of Human Needs, Abraham Maslow puts emphasis on the hierarchy of needs, stating that some are more urgent than others. On the base of the pyramid he places food, water, and shelter. On a second level, he places the need for safety and security, followed by belonging or love. The need for self-esteem is found on a fourth level, and finally on a fifth and final level, personal fulfilment.<sup>3</sup> Maslow argues that each human being is trying to meet needs on a certain level at any one time. An individual looking to meet needs for food and water will not be looking to meet needs of belonging, love or self-esteem. Only when the needs on the lower end of the Pyramid are met, will humans look to meet their need for personal fulfilment.

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<sup>3</sup> In Marker, Susan, op cit.

John Burton has been applying human needs theory more actively to current social and political conflicts. In his work on protracted, social conflicts, he looks at how universal human needs often are neglected, leading groups to use violence to claim their rights and satisfying their needs. In what is really a compatibility of human needs, Burton argues that education and culture make parties manipulate the issues and dehumanising the other parties.

In Marshall Rosenberg's approach, human needs are universal and meeting them is essential to human survival and well-being. Rosenberg groups the needs in sub-groups, and is open to the existence of needs beyond what he has defined. He states that our education and culture often alienate us from connecting with our real needs, and through Nonviolent Communication, he proposes a model for connecting with our own and others' needs, an approach he applies in all levels of society and which he has used in mediation in several countries.

The Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef also proposes nine universal human needs, through which he argues that we can achieve human development and peaceful societies. Max-Neef defines his main proposal, Human Scale Development, as "focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state."<sup>4</sup> Like Burton and Rosenberg, Max-Neef agrees that no need is superior to other, and that they are all complementary and essential to human life.

In Table 1, needs as defined by Maslow, Burton, Rosenberg and Max-Neef have been presented. Please note that there is no relationship between needs in each row. They are merely listed according to the theorist who refers to them. Only Maslow ranks them by importance. The other theorists' lists of needs are random.

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<sup>4</sup> Max-Neef, Manfred. On Human Needs and Human Scale Development. Available on <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/background/maxneef.htm>

**Table 1: Human Needs, as presented by various theorists**

<b>Maslow<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Burton<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Rosenberg<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>Max Neef<sup>8</sup></b>
Food, water, shelter (1)	Distributive justice	Physical Nurturance	Subsistence
Safety and security (2)	Safety, Security	Interdependence	Protection
Belonging or love (3)	Belongingness, Love	Integrity	Affection
Self-esteem (4)	Self-esteem	Autonomy	Understanding
Personal fulfilment (5)	Personal fulfilment	Play	Creation
	Identity	Celebration and mourning	Identity
	Cultural security	Spiritual Communion	Leisure, Idleness
	Freedom		Freedom
	Participation		Participation

### **Needs vs strategies or satisfiers**

Rosenberg and Max-Neef both mention the importance of distinguishing between needs and strategies or satisfiers. In mediation, strategies and satisfiers are referred to as positions. While needs are universal and non-negotiable, strategies/satisfiers are cultural, contextual, specific and negotiable. They also point out that needs are always compatible, while strategies or satisfiers may not be. This concept is key to the human needs approach, as it implies that all conflicts are resolvable when we focus on human needs. What seemed to be an irresolvable conflict between Egypt and Israel in the 1960s, was indeed resolvable when needs were taken into account. While both states wanted the Sinai Peninsula (their strategies/satisfiers/positions were incompatible), their underlying needs were compatible. While Egypt's need was integrity and identity (due to Sinai's historical importance), Israel needed protection and security. Clarifying their needs through the Camp David negotiations, new compatible strategies were discovered. Egypt kept the Sinai Peninsula and Israel was allowed to place troops there. In a conflict, it is essential to become clear on all unmet needs, and find strategies which will meet both or all parties' needs.

Max-Neef also mentions that some satisfiers, while satisfying one need, may well hinder or impede another need from being met. These are then inhibiting satisfiers. Other satisfiers can satisfy several needs, or needs of several persons, at the same time, and are

<sup>5</sup> Each need has been labelled according to its importance, 1 being the most important need. In Marker, Susan, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> In Marker, Susan, op. cit. In a different paper, Burton uses other needs, as listed in Appendix 2.

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg lists these as groups of needs. Within "interdependence", for instance, he includes acceptance, community, consideration, emotional safety, empathy, love, trust, understanding, and others. The terms used are therefore not directly comparable. In Rosenberg, Marshall. *Nonviolent Communication. A Language of Life.* California, 2003: Puddle Dancer Press, p. 213

<sup>8</sup> Max-Neef, Manfred, op. cit.

considered synergic satisfiers. He also refers to pseudo-satisfiers, violators and destroyers.<sup>9</sup> Without going into detail in this paper, it clearly remains important to clearly identify needs to find synergic satisfiers which can meet several needs at the same time.

### **The Role of Perception**

Human perception also plays an essential role in conflict resolution. Culture, education and societal influences shape our minds and our perceptions. Enemy images are created, convincing groups and individuals that certain needs can only be met by certain strategies and that other groups are intrinsic obstacles to their needs being met. While a certain ethnic group's needs for identity, autonomy, protection and equality may be met through a range of strategies, lack of trust and enemy images of the "other" may convince the group that the only acceptable or possible solution is a separate state. Building trust, deconstructing enemy images and fostering cooperation are therefore key elements in human needs-based conflict resolution.

### **Usefulness of Human Needs Theory**

Much can be said to the usefulness of HNT in working with violent conflict. Firstly, it has wide applicability. While some see it merely as a tool to be applied in prevention or post-conflict peacebuilding, practitioners like Marshall Rosenberg also use HNT in mediation in violent conflicts. It has also been useful in reconciliation efforts, and Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is being used currently in restorative justice structures in countries like Brazil and the US. Equally, it can be applied in all levels of society, for intra- and inter-personal conflict, inter-group conflict and in an international setting. Secondly, it focuses on the source of conflict, looking at how best the parties can have their needs met, and those of others. Finding strategies to meet underlying needs, we may be able to reduce the use of expensive peacekeeping, peace enforcement and creating of buffer zones. Thirdly, HNT emphasises common humanity. In a world context where differences are accentuated, HNT attempts to unify human beings from different regions and cultures, creating a common understanding of who we are and how others need and feel the same way we do. Susan Marker also notes a fourth advantage, in that HNT points out that human needs are non-negotiable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Max-Neef, Manfred, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> In Marker, Susan, op. cit

“Needs, unlike interests, cannot be traded, suppressed, or bargained for. Thus, the human needs approach makes a case for turning away from traditional negotiation models that do not take into account nonnegotiable issues. These include interest-based negotiation models that view conflict in terms of win-win or other consensus-based solutions, and conventional power models (primarily used in the field of negotiation and international relations) that construct conflict and conflict management in terms of factual and zero-sum game perspectives.”<sup>11</sup>

HNT is, in sum, widely applicable, may provide sustainable solutions as it focuses on the source of the conflict, it promotes understanding from a base of our common humanity and it highlights the distinction between negotiable and non-negotiable issues in a conflict.

### **Some Criticisms of Human Needs Theory**

Still, there are drawbacks to HNT. Firstly, how do we really define human needs? Table 1 shows several discrepancies between the various theorists, even between Burton, Rosenberg and Max-Neef, who agree that all needs are universal, non-hierarchical and complementary. If a human need is simply what we perceive it to be, it will be hard to truly address human needs in a conflict situation. Secondly, should we prioritise certain needs over others? Is Maslow right in asserting that needs for food and shelter should be met before considering needs for self-esteem and self-fulfilment? Or is protection, rest and play equally important to secure human well-being? Thirdly, there seems to be an exaggerated belief in the importance of dialogue. How can warring parties sit down and talk things through, identifying their needs? And even if it is so, that HNT cannot be applied in violent situations, how useful will it be in conflict management today? Finally, assuming we identify needs for conflicting parties. Is there any assurance that these needs are the most important ones? Who will decide? And how will we know whether the identified needs and the strategies to be applied, are the most accurate ones?

Surely, more study needs to be carried out on the validity, applicability and usefulness of HNT in today's violent conflicts. Nevertheless, by attempting to apply HNT to real cases, and knowing that mediators often and successfully apply the concepts of “positions and interest” similarly to “strategies and needs” in HNT, there is some value to its application. Before applying Human Needs Theory to the conflict in Sri Lanka, let us now move on to looking at the conflict in question. A complex and intractable conflict which has been going on for decades, or even centuries, according to some, this paper can in no way offer a comprehensive understanding of the many issues, actors, variables and factors in the conflict. It will therefore look at main issues in the conflict between the

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<sup>11</sup> Marker, Susan, *ibid.*

Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) since the uprising of the latter in 1976, setting a time period for the study.

### **The Conflict in Sri Lanka**

The conflict in Sri Lanka is currently undergoing a ceasefire, agreed to by the parties through negotiations on 23 February 2002. Although there have been violations of the ceasefire, there has not been direct fighting between the parties since 2002. Much research points to colonialism as the origins of the conflict, where the British colonisers gave preferences to the Tamil population which they had brought from India to work on their plantations. The education, training and employment opportunities the Tamils were given during British rule were perceived as discriminatory practices for the Sinhalese majorities. President Kumaratunga confirms:

“[Poverty] and ignorance invariably lead to frustration, humiliation and conflict. The “divide and rule” policy of former colonial powers, dispossessed the vast majority of our population, of established and developed traditional means of livelihood, thereby marginalizing them, while privileges were accorded to a small and selected élite class who were willing to owe allegiance to the colonial rulers. [...] The focus of development limited to only those areas identified for commercial agriculture for the benefit of the metropolis resulted in increasing poverty in the rest of the country”<sup>12</sup>

When Ceylon, as it was called then, achieved independence in 1947, Prime Minister Don Stephen Senanayake, of the United National Party (UNP) pursued quite reconciliatory policies between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, but died abruptly in 1952. His successor, his son Dudley Shelton Senanayake took over, but lost to Solomon Bandaranaike from the Sinhalese Socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party in 1956. This led to quite a shift in relations between Tamils and Sinhalese, as Bandanaraike clearly favoured Sinhalese, even making Sinhalese Ceylon’s official language. After his death in 1960, he was succeeded by his widow Sirimavo Bandanaraike, who furthered preferences for the Sinhalese during her rule until 1977, only interrupted in 1965-1970 by a Senanayake comeback. Joined by the Marxists, she pushed for a new constitution in 1972, naming Ceylon Sri Lanka and nationalising most industries. UNP came back to power in 1977, under the leadership of Jayawardene, and although he tried stabilising relations between the Tamils and the

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<sup>12</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika. *Conflict Resolution and Peace Building – Lessons from Sri Lanka*. Speech before the Asia Society in New York in September 2004. Available on <http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/kumaratunga04.html>



Sinhalese, partially by passing a new constitution in 1978, the LTTE had already been founded in 1976 and a civil war broke out in 1983. President Kumaratunga asserts that the “conflict worsened to the point of armed resistance to the State, since the organized attacks against innocent Tamil people and their property, executed by one particular government 21 years ago, in July 1983.”<sup>13</sup> Since then, the conflict has “claimed more than 65 000 lives since 1983 and displaced more than 1.5 million people. It displays a number of features making it symptomatic of many other "protracted conflicts.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Issues in the Sri Lanka Conflict**

So, what are the issues of the conflict? Is this an ethnic conflict? Does it have religious grounding? “Often, the cause of all armed or violent conflicts appears to stem from demands by various communities living within states for the recognition of their own specific identities – ethnic, linguistic or religious.”<sup>15</sup> The conflict therefore is a divergence in opinion on how the state should be run, or how power should be distributed within the state. Rajmohan Gandhi explains that many violent conflicts in Asia, such as “the devastating war between Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese in Sri Lanka are religious conflicts in the sense that the opposing sides are adherents of differing religious beliefs, but they can only be fully understood when the ethnic, national, social, and political dimensions are taken into consideration.”<sup>16</sup> The research NGO Flashpoint states the following about the origin of the conflict:

“At the foundation of the conflict is an ancient and pointless argument, based on mythology, over which people first populated the island and their historical rights to call it their homeland. It seems apparent that whichever group arrived first, all originated from nearby India. Regardless of which ethnic groups settled first, they later succumbed to European colonial rule, which exaggerated ethnic and religious divisions. After suffering disadvantage during British colonial rule, the majority Sinhala assumed political control after independence, pursuing chauvinist and repressive policies, and driving the Tamil people to rise up armed opposition.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, *Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation Sri Lanka. Background Notes on the Conflict in Sri Lanka*. Available on <http://www.berghof-center.org/english/projects/projects.htm?srilanka.htm~bottomFrame>

<sup>15</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *op. cit*.

<sup>16</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Understanding Religious Conflicts*. In *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia*, by European Network for Conflict Prevention, 2002. Available on <http://www.conflict-prevention.net/page.php?id=45>

<sup>17</sup> Flashpoints, *World Conflicts. Fact Sheet on Sri Lanka*. Available on [http://www.flashpoints.info/countries-conflicts/Sri\\_Lanka-web/Sri\\_Lanka\\_briefing.html](http://www.flashpoints.info/countries-conflicts/Sri_Lanka-web/Sri_Lanka_briefing.html)

Miriam Young agrees with this point of view, stating that there were “unaddressed political and economic grievances following independence. Since independence, Sinhalese majority governments have attempted to reverse what they viewed as British favoritism of Tamils in education and government positions. Successive governments instituted policies that discriminated against Tamils in language and education and gave Buddhism pride of place in the constitution. The unwillingness of these governments to address Tamil grievances escalated a political conflict into a violent and multidimensional one.”<sup>18</sup>

Other authors have looked at the religious aspects of the conflict. In Sri Lanka, “a large majority belong to the Buddhist faith and speak the Sinhalese language, though there are also many Sinhalese-speaking Christians. Sri Lanka's Tamil speakers, who are mostly Hindus but include some Muslims or Christians, probably comprise about 20 percent of the population. Buddhism receives specific mention in the Sri Lankan constitution.”<sup>19</sup> However, as Young points out, although “religion plays a role in the conflict, most Sri Lankans view its origins more in ethnic rather than religious terms.”<sup>20</sup>

Diagnosing the armed conflict as having origins in ethnic terms may not prove very useful to its resolution. Ethnic groups will not cease to exist, unless they are systematically eliminated, and so any reference to the conflict being ethnic may well make its resolution even more difficult. Nevertheless, it is common that groups are labelled as problematic, a practice which may well promote enemy images and decompose essential trust.

More constructive is the origin as determined by the Berghof Institute : “This is essentially a dispute about recognition, between a "majority" Sinhalese community (comprising 74% of the population) which dominates state and government, and a Tamil minority (13%), which sees itself not as a minority but as a nation with equal rights, including the right to self-determination.”<sup>21</sup> Zunzer adds that the conflict is an ethno-political conflict, but that it “cannot be reduced to a Tamil versus Sinhalese struggle”.<sup>22</sup> Other interrelated conflicts to be taken into account are the “radical-revolutionary youth uprising in the South; a labour-related and social-structural conflict in the plantation sector; and the tensions between Muslims and Tamils in the Eastern Province.”<sup>23</sup> Erik Solheim, one of mediators from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirms that he sees

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<sup>18</sup> Young, Miriam. *Sri Lanka's Long War*. Asia Pacific Center for Justice and Peace. In Volume 5, Number 35, October 2000. Available on [http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol5/v5n35srilanka\\_body.html](http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol5/v5n35srilanka_body.html)

<sup>19</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan, op. cit

<sup>20</sup> Young, Miriam, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Zunzer, Wolfram. *Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004. Available on <http://www.berghof-center.org/publications/occasional/boc26e.pdf>, pp. 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> Zunzer, Wolfram, *ibid*, pp. 11-12.

this not as a religious conflict, but as an ethnic-national conflict.<sup>24</sup> He points out that the two groups do not speak the same language, and that interaction therefore is limited.

### **Human Needs Theory applied to the Conflict in Sri Lanka**

When applying the Human Needs Theory (HNT) to the conflict in Sri Lanka, it may be useful to look at one party at the time, trying to identify what their needs are behind their positions or desired strategies. The LTTE continues their 1976 claims for a Tamil Eelam in the North-East of Sri Lanka, a separate state for the Tamil minorities.<sup>25</sup> LTTE also expects the issues around establishing an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) to be resolved before dialoguing on some of the main issues, as the ISGA “reflects the needs of the people in the NE”.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, President Kumaratunga signals that Tamils want equal rights and that there has been a “continuous neglect of the frustrations of the Tamil people by all governments since Independence.”<sup>27</sup> She adds that the LTTE also desire to “continue child conscription and illegal tax collection.”<sup>28</sup> These five issues – a separate state, an ISGA before dialoguing other issues, equal rights, continuous child conscription and illegal tax deduction – are all issues that the LTTE is pushing for or implementing. These are mostly strategies, and through applying HNT, the underlying needs in each issue may be the following, as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2: Identifying possible needs of the LTTE**

<b>Preferred Strategy</b>	<b>Underlying Needs</b>
A separate Tamil State	Autonomy, Consideration, Respect, Safety
ISGA before other issues	Consideration, Respect, Safety, Trust
Equal rights	Safety, Equality
Child conscription	Subsistence, Support
Tax Collection	Subsistence, Support

As Rosenberg points out, needs have to be verified with the party. This paper can only guess what needs may be underlying in a conflict like this. By verifying the needs, the party will also become more conscious of their needs, discarding some while emphasising others. Verification is therefore key, and is done through processes like mediation. In the case of

<sup>24</sup> Solheim, Erik. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway. Personal telephone interview, 26 September 2005.

<sup>25</sup> As confirmed by Erik Solheim in the interview on 26 September 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Zunzer, Wolfram. Sri Lanka Round Table. New Perspectives in the Sri Lankan Peace Process - The Current Political Situation and the Role of the International Community. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004. Available on [http://www.berghof-center.org/publications/background/Round\\_Table\\_Berlin\\_Report.pdf](http://www.berghof-center.org/publications/background/Round_Table_Berlin_Report.pdf), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, op. cit

<sup>28</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, ibid.

LTTE, we may easily understand the logic behind the argument for a separate Tamil state. Such a strategy can meet many needs, and it may be difficult to find another strategy which can meet the same needs in an efficient and effective way. This also shows that strategies which meet many needs are more difficult to negotiate than strategies that meet one or two needs. It would be easier to find ways to provide support and subsistence to the LTTE, replacing child conscription and tax collection, than finding other ways to provide safety, consideration, respect and autonomy.

When looking at the Government's strategies, President Kumaratunga has said that they "do not insist on prior disarmament. However, we do insist on the LTTE's acceptance of a solution that is not the dismemberment of the State. In our scheme of things, disarmament must come when the agreed solution to the conflict begins to be implemented. The renunciation of violence is implicitly expressed in the Ceasefire Agreement [...] [and] the renunciation of the demand for a separate state is implicit in the LTTE's agreement to explore a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka."<sup>29</sup> When asked what is most important to the GOSL, Solheim pointed out their desire to keep a unitary state.<sup>30</sup> Applying the above-mentioned positions to the HNT, it may look like outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Identifying possible needs of the GOSL**

<b>Preferred Strategy</b>	<b>Underlying Needs</b>
Unitary state, one Sri Lanka	Recognition, Safety, Subsistence
Disarmament upon implementation	Trust, Respect, Consideration
Renunciation of violence	Safety, Trust

Identifying possible needs behind the desired strategies on behalf of the GOSL enables further exploration of options and new strategies. Before looking at possible perspectives for resolution, let us also look at other decisive factors in this conflict.

### **Enemy Images and Lack of Trust in Sri Lanka**

In a speech in September 2004, President Bandaranaike Kumaratunga spoke of how people throughout times have fought against each other "for domination" or "for the purpose of domination"<sup>31</sup> over certain territories. This in itself is not a useful way to look at conflict. However we choose to deal with conflict, regarding groups as having the intention

<sup>29</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Solheim, Erik, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *op. cit.*

to dominate, we are not looking at our own unmet needs, but rather diagnosing, stereotyping and labelling others. Since the uprising of the LTTE in 1976, there has been an increasing alienation on behalf of each party, building enemy images of the other. The “other” becomes a threat to my existence, and elimination or separation therefore seem to be the only viable solution. A protracted conflict like the one in Sri Lanka, having lasted for more than 30 years, promotes enemy images and a lack of trust which makes any communication difficult. It is difficult to see how your enemy actually has an intention to meet his needs behind what he is doing. Public statements, and media coverage, further alienate the parties. President Kumaratunga’s statement is a clear example of how culture and education throughout the years have created images of the “good and the evil”:

“We are engaging one of the world’s most ruthless and anti-democratic organizations which employs violent terrorist means, in a process of dialogue and negotiations in the search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We have chosen this path because we believe in life, because we believe in humanity; because we believe that even the most unreasonable terrorist group or at least some of them, must sometime reassume their humanity. We do not believe that any problem could be resolved through the destruction of life, the protection of which in the last count, is the only moral justification for the existence of all human institutions, including the state.”<sup>32</sup>

Her intention with such a statement is most likely satisfying a need for recognition, appreciation for her Government’s efforts in dialoguing with LTTE. At the same time, such statements may well create even more distance to LTTE. Where a party meets little understanding for his needs, it becomes difficult to establish openness, trust and resolution.

### **Obstacles to Resolution**

According to Young, there are three<sup>33</sup> major obstacles to resolving the conflict:

- “the intense rivalry between the two main Sinhalese political parties, the Peoples Assembly (PA) and the United National Party (UNP);
- the fierce opposition of the Buddhist clergy to any accommodation of Tamil grievances, which they view as threatening to Sinhalese Buddhism; and
- the apparent unwillingness of the LTTE to entertain any settlement short of a separate state.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> In her text from 2000, Young mentioned a fourth element, the GOSL’s reluctance to accept an international mediator. This is no longer an obstacle, as Norway was accepted by both parties to mediate in the conflict.

<sup>34</sup> Young, Miriam, *op. cit.*

To this, I would add the difficulties presented by the reiterated enemy images portrayed by media and the parties. Solheim asserts that there is little violence and crime in communities where Tamils and Sinhalese live together, and that there is a generally peaceful co-habitation.<sup>35</sup> The idea that the enemy image merely is a construction is therefore even more likely to come true for this conflict. In fact, the Tamil threat as perceived by Sinhalese Buddhists is part of this enemy image construct. Young's first obstacle, political rivalry, may also add to the complexity of the conflict, where short-term struggle often comes in the way of long-term visioning and planning. No-one party wants to be seen as the weak, ceding power to the Tamils. Here, there may be an underlying need for recognition and support.

### **How to Reach a Resolution Based on HNT**

Key to the HNT-model is that both or all parties' needs are presented and acknowledged by the other parties. This process of profound understanding of the other's needs is also called empathy,<sup>36</sup> and is essential to conflict resolution. Lack of trust and enemy images often dehumanise the parties' views of each other, and being seen for the intention, for the humanity, is therefore a turning point in peace processes. LTTE seeing the Government's fear in splitting the island and their need for recognition, respect and safety would be an important first step. The GOSL would also need to empathise with LTTE's need for autonomy, equality, safety and recognition for there to be important progress towards resolution. Second, both parties' needs will have to be addressed in the strategies. Which government arrangement will satisfy LTTE's needs for autonomy, consideration, respect and safety, while also meeting the GOSL's need for recognition, safety and subsistence? President Kumaratunga seems to come close in her description of a possible solution:

“Firstly, we recognize the need to build a pluralist, democratic State, where the human rights, freedom and equal opportunity for all will be guaranteed and practised. Then we undertake the actions required to achieve this. We believe that the solution lies in seeking alternatives to the concept of a monolithic, unitary state - to blend power with principle, to reconcile authority with freedom. We are looking at an extensive form of devolution of power, with a high level of democratic participation in decision making, law making and governance by the regional authorities or the devolved units.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Solheim, Erik, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Applied by Rosenberg in all his texts. Rosenberg, Marshall, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, op. cit

My concern comes with her next statement: “We are seeking a compromise that would satisfy the aspirations of all the communities of peoples living within our state - a compromise that would be democratic and pluralistic.”<sup>38</sup> In HNT, there is no compromise. A compromise is no good solution. If compromise means “take a little, lose a little”, it will most likely not provide a long-term solution. In HNT it is always possible to find a win-win solution, where all needs are met. It requires time, energy and creativity, but no compromise is necessary. Solheim also confirmed that a federal system in Sri Lanka would be a compromise.<sup>39</sup> I am certain that both President Kumaratunga and Solheim refer to a compromise as a positive solution. Nevertheless, whenever there is an implied “loss”, the peace may not be as stable and sustainable as one would wish for.

## **Conclusions**

Rejecting the use of violence to stop violence, conflict resolution approaches look at the roots of conflict in order to address them properly for a long, stable and sustainable peace. Military interventions have seldom led to peaceful societies, and Sri Lanka, having experience both an Indian intervention and a Government offensive, is no exception. Within conflict resolution approaches, the Human Needs Theory has not received much attention. HNT focuses on human well-being depending on whether our human needs are satisfied. Authors such as Maslow, Burton, Rosenberg and Max-Neef argue that violence surges when certain human needs are not being satisfied, and that the violence in itself is an attempt to meet such needs. This paper has attempted to show that applying the HNT to the conflict in Sri Lanka may well help the peace process towards a sustainable resolution. By looking at underlying needs, such as recognition, safety, autonomy, equality, subsistence, respect and consideration, it becomes possible to look at strategies and solutions which may take all needs into account, on both sides. Being aware of the effect of enemy images and perceptions after more than 30 years of war, a needs-based solution is within reach. It also remains key to work on the lack of trust between the parties. It seems to be habitual that both parties expect certain demands to be met by the other party before committing to progress on certain issues.

In President Kumaratunga’s continued efforts to dialogue with the LTTE, it may facilitate the negotiation to view LTTE as trying to meet their needs, rather than implicitly labelling them “terrorists”, as she did during a speech in New York.<sup>40</sup> Such statements may

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<sup>38</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Solheim, Erik, *op. cit*.

<sup>40</sup> Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chandrika, *op. cit*.

undermine the understanding the Tamils need for their situation. Since 1997, LTTE has also been on the US Government's list of terrorist organisations, and the GOSL may be attempting to secure US support when indirectly labelling the LTTE as terrorist. Despite the fact that the GOSL also recognises the LTTE for its efforts and collaboration, a continued use of negative labels and enemy images may slow the process down and stimulate resentment among the Tamils. The government's need to protect her people and her need for recognition from the international community may be met more constructively through naming the LTTE as a group representing people with urgent needs, whose strategies are less useful in meeting needs of all Sri Lankans. Connecting with their needs, rather than using enemy images and labelling, while not justifying their acts, may prove successful in a continued dialogue on the island.



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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Human Needs, according to John Burton<sup>41</sup>

- Safety/Security -- the need for structure, predictability, stability, and freedom from fear and anxiety.
- Belongingness/Love -- the need to be accepted by others and to have strong personal ties with one's family, friends, and identity groups.
- Self-esteem -- the need to be recognized by oneself and others as strong, competent, and capable. It also includes the need to know that one has some effect on her/his environment.
- Personal fulfillment -- the need to reach one's potential in all areas of life.
- Identity -- goes beyond a psychological "sense of self." Burton and other human needs theorists define identity as a sense of self in relation to the outside world. Identity becomes a problem when one's identity is not recognized as legitimate, or when it is considered inferior or is threatened by others with different identifications.
- Cultural security -- is related to identity, the need for recognition of one's language, traditions, religion, cultural values, ideas, and concepts.
- Freedom -- is the condition of having no physical, political, or civil restraints; having the capacity to exercise choice in all aspects of one's life.
- Distributive justice -- is the need for the fair allocation of resources among all members of a community.
- Participation -- is the need to be able to actively partake in and influence civil society.

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<sup>41</sup> In Marker, Susan, op. cit.

**Appendix 2: Manfred Max-Neef's Model on Human Scale Development<sup>42</sup>**

<b>Fundamental Human Needs</b>	<b>Being (qualities)</b>	<b>Having (things)</b>	<b>Doing (actions)</b>	<b>Interacting (settings)</b>
Subsistence	physical and mental health	food, shelter work	feed, clothe, rest, work	living environment, social setting
Protection	care, adaptability autonomy	social security, health systems, work	co-operate, plan, take care of, help	social environment, dwelling
affection	respect, sense of humour, generosity, sensuality	friendships, family, relationships with nature	share, take care of, make love, express emotions	privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness
understanding	critical capacity, curiosity, intuition	literature, teachers, policies educational	analyse, study, meditate investigate,	schools, families universities, communities,
participation	receptiveness, dedication, sense of humour	responsibilities, duties, work, rights	cooperate, dissent, express opinions	associations, parties, churches, neighbourhoods
leisure	imagination, tranquillity spontaneity	games, parties, peace of mind	day-dream, remember, relax, have fun	landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone
creation	imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity	abilities, skills, work, techniques	invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	spaces for expression, workshops, audiences
identity	sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency	language, religions, work, customs, values, norms	get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself	places one belongs to, everyday settings
freedom	autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness	equal rights	dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness	Anywhere

<sup>42</sup> Max-Neef, Manfred, op. cit

