



A.G.S.E.P.

Aims and visions

The Asian German Sports Exchange Programme (A.G.S.E.P.) supports the Sri Lankan peace process by means of organising sports events and social projects. The headquarters are located in Marawila, Sri Lanka; an office of correspondence is located in Munich, Germany. Dietmar Doering is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of A.G.S.E.P..

The aim of A.G.S.E.P.'s activities is to support the peace process in Sri Lanka by means of various kinds of sports events, like football, table tennis, hockey, badminton, dancing, tennis, swimming, and volleyball camps and tournaments. Acknowledging the fact that sports can transcend ethnical, cultural, and religious cleavages by uniting people with different backgrounds on a neutral platform, A.G.S.E.P. intends to positively contribute to the peace process and mutual understanding between Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim groups. By connecting sportspeople A.G.S.E.P. provides a basis for approximation between international and local teams, and even more importantly, between local teams from the estranged communities of war-torn Sri Lanka.

A.G.S.E.P. is engaged in the following fields of operation:

1. promoting all kinds of sports and development in the poor and remote areas of Sri Lanka by means of interaction and exchanges between national and international sports teams,
2. undertaking feasibility studies, research, and appraisal, and executing programmes and projects for sportspeople and the community development in poor and remote areas of Sri Lanka,

3. organising diversified training courses, workshops, and seminars that are relevant to international sports programmes in order to promote sports practice, language skills, and providing sports equipment,
4. and promoting and organising social projects and other activities in Sri Lanka relevant for the peace process with the assistance of government departments.

According to the A.G.S.E.P. philosophy sports function as a bridge for inter-cultural communication and as a medium which is capable of melting the ice between different ethnic groups and cultures. Thus, sports are a form of social communication which can help to overcome language barriers and ongoing conflicts.

Genesis and History

Between 1987 and 1989, Sri Lanka suffered from an internal conflict instigated by an ultra-radical Marxist group, the JVP (Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna – People's Liberation Front). At the peak of the conflict public life was brought to an entire standstill due to curfews declared either by the government or the JVP. The movement declined in 1989, after the execution of the JVP leader Rohan Wijeweera, leaving the country in utter turmoil. The number of victims is estimated 40,000, among them many young people, public servants, and government representatives.

Coincidentally, in 1989, the German teacher Dietmar Doering signed a one-year contract with the Ministry of Sports assigning him the coach of the Sri Lankan table tennis national team. At that time, table tennis world championships took place in Dortmund, Germany. The Sri Lankan table tennis national team manager, however, was unable to pay the required entry fees for his team to participate in the world cup. This was the birth hour of the Asian German Sports exchange Programme.

The question was how to find a quick solution to pay the entry fees for the young table tennis national players. Hence, the idea was born to arrange a friendly match between a local German table tennis team in Essen near Dortmund, and to ask the hosting German club for financial support. Set and done. Two table tennis

clubs from Essen took the opportunity to host a national team from Asia for the first time in their club history. The funds generated by the participating German teams were sufficient to pay the entry fees and enabled the young Sri Lankan talents to take part in the world cup in Dortmund.

For the German clubs it was a unique event, national anthems were played, national flags were presented, and the local media covered the event, thereby crossing town council borders. The organisers confirmed that, even on such a short notice, it had been a successful venture encouraging the desire to repeat that kind of sport exchange. The wish for a repetition on a broader scale was uttered by both, the Sri Lankan athletes and the German hosts. Based on the positive experience of this initial event the idea for a regular reciprocal sports exchange programme between Sri Lanka and Germany was born. Under the name of Sri Lankan German Sports Exchange Programme this idea was subsequently realised with over 5,000 sports people from both countries participating between 1989 and 1999.

Since 1995, the programme has been extended to other South Asian nations (Thailand, Vietnam, and the Maldives) and was therefore renamed Asian German Sports Exchange Programme (A.G.S.E.P.).

Recent Activities

Due to changes in the global and local environment, such as the terror attacks of September, 11, 2001, the introduction of the Euro, and the significant intensification of LTTE activities (July 2001, airport attack) A.G.S.E.P. had to adopt new strategies.

In 2002, the ceasefire agreement between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE brokered by the Norwegian facilitators offered the possibility to realise these strategies and even go beyond.

Shortly after the agreement had been signed A.G.S.E.P. contacted the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society in Wavuniya represented by Mr Sivanathan Kisshor and made arrangements to meet the political wing of the LTTE in Kilinochchi in order to elaborate possibilities for a sports exchange programme between the North and the South of Sri Lanka. Thus, A.G.S.E.P. could finally apply its philosophy – connecting

sportspeople – to the national level, thereby fostering inter-ethnic mutual understanding by means of sports activities.

Sports Training Camps in the North

Although no formal agreement had been signed with the relevant authorities in the North an informal understanding was achieved resulting in the establishment of sports training camps organised and conducted by foreign university students, covering the fields of football, badminton, table tennis, hockey, basketball, volleyball, and athletics. One of the objectives of these camps was to create qualified sports teams which could take part in inter-ethnic sports events with the predominantly Sinhalese sports communities from the South.

Memorandum of Understanding

In 2003, the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees represented by Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena and A.G.S.E.P. signed a Memorandum of Understanding which lay the foundation for successful future cooperation promoting the peace process. (cf. Annex).

Inter-cultural football tournament

On October 3, 2003, for the first time in 20 years, a predominantly Sinhalese women's football team played a friendly match against a German women's team in the Tamil dominated town of Wavuniya. More than 15,000 predominantly Tamil spectators supported the Sinhalese football team. Representatives of several foreign missions in Colombo and political representatives of the LTTE (who had just opened a town office in Wavuniya) attended the unique event. Moreover, representatives of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission and approximately 250 Sri Lankan security staff were also present. In fact, this football match was the very first peaceful physical contact between the conflict parties in two decades. The most significant incident of high symbolic value was the decoration of a Sri Lankan police woman as the most outstanding player of the match by a LTTE political leader – an encounter which was unthinkable even weeks before the football match took place.

National Run for Peace

In September 2004, A.G.S.E.P. organised the National Run for Peace in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Tamil Eelam Sports Council. Geographically, the run reflected the intention to bring people together. 12 cities located in different parts of the island, each of which sent 40 runners, contributed to the event. The runners converged in Kandy, where the closing ceremony was held. After an exhausting two-day run which comprised a distance of approximately 150-200 km from each city to Kandy, finally, all participants united in the heart of Sri Lanka celebrating their common sports spirit. The extraordinary task for the organisers had been to motivate the authorities in the LTTE-controlled areas to participate in an event which would conclude in a government-controlled area. This was the first event in which Tamil, Muslim, and Singhalese sportspeople have commonly taken part since the 1980s.

Tsunami Aid

The devastating Tsunami of December 26, 2004, destroyed most of the coastline of Sri Lanka and most of the houses and villages located nearby. As a result, over 40,000 people lost their lives and many were missing. Immediately after this catastrophe one of A.G.S.E.P.'s project partners, Peace Village International, offered significant medical aid for Tsunami victims, mainly focusing on the prevention of post-tsunami water-borne diseases. Six cargo planes reached Sri Lanka within ten days, carrying approximately 400 metric tons of medical supply. A.G.S.E.P.'s voluntary work force – university students, interns, and other volunteers – distributed this medical equipment to the most affected coastal areas within a very short period of time. Due to its good contacts to the North A.G.S.E.P. did not have to deal with bureaucratic obstacles with regard to transport logistics. Consequently, more than one million people directly or indirectly benefited from the medicine, and fortunately, not a single case of water-borne disease was reported in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami.

Furthermore, A.G.S.E.P. delivered a water purification machine to the affected areas in the North, providing 15,000 villagers with drinking water, and still serving as a water resource today. Even international organisations, such as the UNHCR and UNICEF, use the resources installed by A.G.S.E.P. for water supplies.

“Night of a Thousand Dinners”

In 2005, A.G.S.E.P., together with PDIP (a think tank dealing with post-conflict and gender issues) organised the “Night of a Thousand Dinners”, an initiative of Adopt-A-Minefield, a programme of the United Nations Association of the USA and the Canadian Landmine Foundation in memory of worldwide landmine victims. This dinner took place simultaneously all over the world.

Distribution of Sirens

In August 2006, A.G.S.E.P., under the aegis of Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena, a Member of Parliament, distributed manually operated sirens in border districts near the LTTE controlled areas. Since the inhabitants of these villages are constantly threatened by LTTE aggression, these sirens shall function as a warning system in case LTTE attacks occur. The sirens had been donated by the Bavarian Central Bank mainly for coastal areas in order to warn the population early enough in case of another tsunami.

International Run for Peace

Inspired by the successful event of 2004, A.G.S.E.P. organised an ‘International Run for Peace’ on October 1st, 2006, in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. About 200 national and international sportspeople registered for 5 km, 10 km or 21 km took part in the run. Sri Lankan athletes from different backgrounds, as well as international participants, such as people working in embassies, international organisations, and international companies, ran through the main avenues of Colombo, thereby catching the attention of the people at the side of the roads and the traffic participants. All together, the runners and the high number of spectators demonstrated mutual acceptance and united in the name of peace despite the recent incidents. The day culminated in a closing ceremony where the best runners were awarded and famous Sri Lankan pop stars provided a variety of entertainment which all spectators enjoyed.

Peace Villages

In the aftermath of the tsunami catastrophe A.G.S.E.P. explored new ways of necessary social engagement. The idea was to build four inter-cultural sports centres, located in the North, East, South, and West of the island. Set up under a Tsunami Relief Programme for affected children and implemented by A.G.S.E.P.

under the aegis of the Peace Village International the centres shall fulfil various important tasks. While the centres in the North, East, and South are still under construction, the sports centre in Nattandiya, located in the West, opened on October 28, 2005, exemplifies how successful and fruitful these centres are. The school is equipped with a football ground, a swimming pool, table tennis, and other outdoor game facilities, as well as several bed houses, a kitchen, and a dining hall.

Within periods of three months around 40 local children, between the age of 8-14, come to the sports centre on regular basis twice a week. While spending the afternoon in the Peace Village Nattandiya, these children attend various courses taught by mainly German and Austrian University students working for A.G.S.E.P.. The emphasis lies on sports games, but also on teaching the children how to swim, taking into account the tsunami experience and the resulting traumata. Furthermore, the students teach the children English and German in order to offer them an additional education and to provide them with a common language enabling them to communicate across cultural borders.

Additional to the weekly programme, A.G.S.E.P. regularly conducts inter-cultural sports weekends for children originating from Tamil, Singhalese and Muslim areas all over the island. These weekends have already been organised twice within the last two months, and the third Peace Village weekend is taking place this weekend (October 13-15, 2006). About 100 children, including children from the war-torn areas join this event and spend three days in Nattandiya. While they enjoy different sports activities and a variety of games they have the opportunity to bridge cultural gaps, thereby literally living A.G.S.E.P.'s philosophy of 'connecting sportspeople' and fostering the peace process. Through sports, games, and fun the children share positive experiences with children of other religious and cultural backgrounds in order to prevent misunderstandings and – in the long term - to support a peaceful and harmonic way of living together.

Future Outlook

The ambition for the future is to further intensify the sports exchange programmes. Moreover, A.G.S.E.P. will in particular concentrate on its sports centres. As soon as all four sports centres are completed the weekend events shall take place on a regular basis following a rotation principle in order to enable children from different parts of the island to see regions they have never seen before and establish friendships regardless of ethnical origin. Moreover, each sports centre shall organise the weekly courses according to the Nattandiya example. In the long run more of these centres shall be built all over the island incorporating local teachers and other qualified personnel.

Another future project A.G.S.E.P. plans to conduct in cooperation with Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena is the establishment of an International Institute for Alternative Medicine for the benefit of those who need and look for alternative medical treatments, based on Ayurveda and other traditional healing methods.

ANNEX

Memorandum of Understanding,
Between
the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees of the Democratic
Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
And
The Asian German Sports Exchange Programme (A.G.S.E.P.)

Article:-01. General Terms of Agreement.

This Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees Of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, hereinafter known as the Ministry and the Asian German Sports Exchange Programme, hereinafter known as A.G.S.E.P. located at Aquarius Sports Resort, Beach Road, Marawila, is based on the common objectives of both parties to support the national policy and covers the implementation of projects listed below:-

1. Promotion of peace and harmony through sports by conducting sports workshops for teachers, coaches, trainers and advanced players in the North and East as well as in the other parts of Sri Lanka amongst war affected populations, with the aim of strengthening the infrastructural development of sports and English teaching workshops for teachers of English.
2. Assist in the rehabilitation and development programs for the war affected population in Sri Lanka, by providing University Students from European countries to work as volunteers.

SIGNATORIES

For the Democratic Socialist

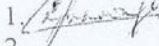
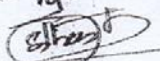
Republic of Sri Lanka



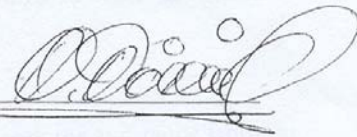
Prof. Jayalath Jayawardena, M.P.
Minister of Rehabilitation, Resettlement
and Refugees
DR. JAYALATH JAYAWARDENA, M.P.
M.B.B.S. (Sri Lanka), F.I.C.S. (USA), M.D.
**MINISTER OF REHABILITATION,
RESETTLEMENT & REFUGEES.**

Witness

Name, Signature, Address

1.  M.C.R.R. Ms. CHARNIKA M.C.N.A.C.I.N.G.E 1.
2. S. Sathesh Kumar M.R.R.R.  2.

For the Asian German
Sports Exchange Programme.



Dietmar Doering
CEO Asian German
Sports Exchange Programme



Witness

Name, Signature, Address

Signed at the Ministry Of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees, no. 14, Baron Jayathilalleke Mawatha Colombo 1 on September 30th 2003.