

## FORWARD

It gives me great pleasure to write a foreword to the selected writings of M.I.M. Mohideen. Mohideen is a renowned and committed activist, who has been campaigning for the rights of the Muslim community for several decades. Functioning as the Secretary General of the North East Muslim Peace Assembly (NEMP) and Coordinator for the Eastern Province Tamil Muslim Peace Committee for the resolution of the ethnic conflict, Mr. Mohideen's dedication and commitment to the championing of the Muslim community's grievances is well known. He holds the distinction of having being elected as a Member of the Muslim group participating in the six rounds of peace talks initiated by the UNF government, to represent Muslim concerns.

During the last five years I have had the opportunity to collaborate with M.I.M Mohideen in a number of initiatives relating to the interests of the Muslim in the Northeast. Our cooperation started when Mohideen requested my assistance in obtaining funds to document the displaced Muslim families, their lands and properties appropriated by the LTTE during the ethnic cleansing in October 1990. The Foundation for Coexistence obtained the necessary funds through US. Aid and Cord Aid, Netherland. I was impressed with the single minded dedication and commitment that he displayed throughout this work. Altogether the North East Muslim Peace Assembly interviewed and documented the 51,000 displaced Muslim families. The work was a painstaking one but he succeeded in documenting with diligence. During the Tsunami devastation he approached me for assistance to record and document the loss of property and land as a result of the Tsunami. I was able to obtain the assistance of Action Aid to support this project and once again Mohideen demonstrated his diligence and commitment. As this series of essays demonstrate Mohideen has also been associated with negotiations with the LTTE through an organization which was called the North Eastern Muslim Peace Assembly (NEMPA) where he is the current Secretary General. I remember the concerns that he expressed to me about the plight of the Muslim in the North East and the continued violations of the Ceasefire Agreement. The CFA showed no respite towards the Muslims and there were killings, harassment, intimidation, extortion and abductions of Muslims. It was during this difficult period that Mohideen approached me and I was pleased to facilitate the formation of NEMPA who then negotiated with the LTTE on the reduction of violence against Muslims. The NEMPA initiative was largely responsible for a dramatic drop in the reduction of violence once agreements were reached with the regional leaders of the LTTE in in Batticaloa (Karuna) and Trincomalee.(Padhuman)

Sri Lanka has experienced the full brunt of a protracted conflict fought between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE] for over 3 decades. A series of peace talks have been held, starting from the Thimpu talks in 1985 and culminating with the recent attempts at negotiation in Oslo, in June 2006. Until the negotiations process initiated by the UNF in 2002, Muslims were not granted independent representation at the talks as the issues concerning them were taken up under the broad category –issues of the Tamil speaking people -.Unfortunately however, the failure in acknowledging the Muslims as a separate group whose grievances are different from those

of the Tamils has resulted in these issues not being addressed at all, thus causing tremendous hardships to the Muslim community in the North and the East.

Mohideen in his essays recounts in details the problems faced by the Muslim community and in particular addresses the need for a power sharing mechanism which can empower and obtain representation for the Muslims in the North and East. His essays are the work of a scholar activist and will be necessary reading for all those who seek to understand the Muslim question in Sri Lanka. Muslim – Tamil animosity has been a phenomenon, which has been simmering since independence, but it reached boiling point with an incident in Akkaraipattu in April 1985. Since this incident, the relationship between the two communities has become extremely hostile, which has resulted in frequent attacks on the Muslims, causing serious economic destabilization, denial of fishing rights and non respect for religion and culture. At times, these events have even resulted in brutal killings. These acts of hostility culminated with the loss of property when the LTTE forcibly evicted Muslims from their lands in October 1990, thereby depriving them not only their homes but also their agriculture land etc. Records indicate that nearly 93,000 acres of agriculture land and their produce belonging to Muslims have been thus appropriated by the LTTE, causing untold economic problems to the Muslim community. Further the forcible eviction of Muslims from the North of over 100,000 Muslims have been a simmering problem in the last sixteen years.

All peaceful efforts by the Muslim leaders to voice these grievances have not borne fruit. Due to the shortcomings in the Ceasefire Agreement signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2002, Muslim grievances were not addressed. Therefore when the negotiations process initiated by the UNF got under way, there was a demand for separate Muslim representation as there was reason to hope direct negotiations would aid the resolution of the problems faced by the Muslims. This hope was further strengthened when the LTTE leader publicly recognized at an international press briefing that the Muslims had legitimate grievances and that these should be resolved along with those of the Tamils. As a result, although a separate Muslim representation was granted at the talks and enabling them to voice the grievances, the issues were not discussed at length due to opposition by the LTTE on the grounds that Tamil grievances should be prioritized as they were the crux of the ethnic conflict. Although the establishment of the North East Muslim Peace Assembly [NEMPA] succeeded in lessening the animosity between the two communities somewhat, the present situation is such that the Muslims living in the North and the East live in fear and insecurity.

Being an organization dedicated to the cause of promoting co existence among different communities, the Foundation for Co- Existence [FCE] takes great pleasure in introducing this booklet to the general public as a thoroughly researched and well compiled document tabulating the grievances as well as the political aspirations of the Muslim community living in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka.

***Kumar Rupesinghe***

*Chairman,*

*Foundation for Co –Existence*