

# **Triennial Progress Report of the Sri Lanka federation of the visually handicapped from July 2000 up to 15<sup>th</sup> May 2003 .**

## **Introduction**

The Sri Lanka Federation of the Visually Handicapped (SLFVH) was established in 1974, completing 29 years of useful existence by this year. Though there had been many ups & downs during this period we are fortunate to have been able to overcome all those setbacks. While we held our 1<sup>st</sup> convention in 1978, today we are meeting at our 10<sup>th</sup>. We are happy to note that there has been rapid progress since the holding of our 9<sup>th</sup> convention. The major factor behind this rapid progress is the effective leadership given to us by our current Hon. President Mr. E.M. Nawaratne Banda JPUM, who holds the position for the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive period, & also due to the dedicated support given by the successive executive committees. Accordingly we give below details of our progress since our 9<sup>th</sup> convention.

## **The New Building**

Amidst severe financial constraints we were able to complete the construction of three floors of the building while the work of the 4<sup>th</sup> floor had to be suspended. At the request of Deshamanya Dr. Lalith Kotelawala the main founder of this project, the first three floors were ceremonially opened by Dr. Kotelawala himself on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2001, which was his birthday. Many representatives from the Ceylinco group of companies along with a large gathering of our well-wishers and friends, as well as our members attended the occasion. We were fortunate to receive funding from the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (NABP) towards meeting the expenses for the purchase of furniture required for this building. By now we have succeeded in getting electricity and water connections for same and have already used the premises for some of our

activities. Accordingly we are happy to note that the holding of our 10<sup>th</sup> convention in this building, is by it self a great achievement made by us.

Though the situation is so, we are facing the enormous task of paying back the loan of Rs.10 million, which was arranged for us by Deshamanya Dr.Lalith Kotelawala from the Seylan Bank on a very concessionary rate of interest. In order to facilitate the payment of the loan, the executive committee has decided to give on rent at least two floors of the building. Until such time we are able to do so, our Hony. President Mr. Nawaratne Banda has volunteered to pay the monthly installments from his personal funds, which demonstrates the quality of a true and dedicated philanthropist.

### Welfare

Though the SLFVH is a pressure group, we operate a welfare scheme as well. The main objectives of this scheme are to provide benefits to our membership while creating in them a positive attitude towards the federation. Our current Hony.1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Mr. Alex M. Jayawardena, is the head of the welfare project. Though there is no separate welfare fund, the efforts made by the head of the project are deeply appreciated by us. Under welfare services, assistance for housing and self employment receive priority and granting such assistance is the major item on the agenda during the annual white cane day celebration. Accordingly, during the period in review, we have given away a sum of Rs.1,62,500/- as assistance for self employment .

As another welfare service rendered to our members, we were successful in taking them on two excursions. One of the main objectives of these excursions was to make our members visit the "Sarana Home" for elderly blind at Godawaya Ambalantota, situated in the southern coast of Sri Lanka.

We are well aware that the assistance receive through the AAG programme is of immense help to the recipients. We have been able to support 25 of our elderly members both

male and female, by providing them with financial assistance at Rs.700/- per month using contributions made to us by help age international, UK. This project is known as "adapt- a- granny "(AAG) programme. We are well aware that this assistance is of immense help to the receivers. This fact has been proved by the responses we get.

### **White cane day celebration.**

Amongst our awareness programmes, the observance of the international white cane day is prominent. Accordingly the International white cane day observance for the year 2000, was held with the then hon. Minister for fisheries housing and social services as the chief guest.

In 2001 the International white cane day was observe with the sponsorship of the lions club of Jawatte summit. The venue was the Colombo public library auditorium.

In 2002, the chief guest of the international white cane day observance meeting was the renowned philanthropist Mr. Thusitha Wijesena. The meeting took place at Sariputhra Vidyalaya, Vithanage Mawatha, Colombo 02. Both in 2001 and 2002 Mr. Thusitha Wijesena provided lunch to those who came to Colombo to participate in the White Cane day observance programme. Usually we import our requirements of white canes from India. In 2001 the ABU supported us with one thousand ten (1010) US\$ for the purchase of 500 white canes and the Indian Airlines office in Colombo gave their support to transport them free of charge. In 2002, while we paid the cost of the white canes the Sri Lankan airlines office came forward to transport them free of charge. We wish to extent our sincere thanks and gratitude to the above mentioned two air lines for their generosity towards the visually handicapped community in this country.

## Medical Assistance

Providing medical assistance through our membership is another aspect of our welfare services. Until 2001 we were able to give only a sum of Rs.400/- per person as medical assistance but, from may 2001 a sum of Rs.750/- per person is being extended. This is an increase of Rs.350/-. This increase has been possible as a result of the efforts by the manager, who is Mr. Alex M. Jayawardena , our Hony.1<sup>st</sup> vice president. During the period in review a sum of Rs.21,400/- has been granted as medical assistance.

## Paper bags envelopes and medical covers manufacturing project.

This project was initiated in 1998. Since then this project has developed substantially. Consequent to an advertisement in the news paper, a large number of institutions and individuals have come forward to donate the paper required for these project. Among them are Smart Shirts Limited Katunayake, The Medilab Institution, The Government Press, Directories Lanka Company Ltd, Hotel Lanka Oberoi, & Print care Ltd, British council play a leading role. We take this opportunity to thank all the individuals and institutions who support us to make this project a success. Some of the papers that we receive cannot be utilized to produce paper bags, envelopes or medical covers. Therefore such paper is graded an soled to the national paper company as scrap, through which we make good, the money spent for the transportation of the waste paper from the donors. During the period concerned a sum of Rs.6000/- has been raised through same. From July 2000 up to May 2003 we have been able to sell envelopes and medical covers to a value of Rs.26,532/- approximately. A significant aspect of the progress in this project is that consequent to a request made by our President, to Mr. Senake Rathnayake of Linea Clothing (pvt) Ltd, (a close friend of our President) they have donated us a hydraulic-electric envelope cutting machine were Rs.175,000/-. This machine can cut 15000 envelopes or medical covers within a working period of 8

hours. The Paper bag project is operated as a service to our membership. The waste paper required for the purpose is given to the members free of charge by the federation & they are allowed to generate funds personally by selling the bags. This is one way we support our members to boost their income.

### **Cording of baggage tags.**

The project for cording of baggage tags used by air passengers was started in 1998. This was made possible through the courtesy of the then printing manager of Air Lanka Ltd, Mr. Thilak Silva & the management of Air Lanka. This project too, is being implemented under the supervision of Mr. Alex. M. Jayawardene, our 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, and is carried out in the premises of the handloom textile weaving center at Nayanalokagama.

### **The Handloom textile weaving & Sales project**

Mr. Alex M. Jayawardena, our Honorary 1<sup>st</sup> vice president is also in charge of this project. It was launched in the year 1993. By now it has developed in strength. The main product is dusters. These are sold to government departments, institutions, semi-government corporations and private sector institutions. We are faced with severe competition when selling these items. During this period the textile weaving project has contributed to the federation a sum of Rs.265,000/- that has gone to our fixed deposits. On the whole, the income of the handloom textile weaving project has been supportive to the activities of the federation in general.

## Music project.

The Music project too is being supervised by our Hony.1st Vice President Mr. Alex M. Jayawardena. The main activities of our choir, is to perform Christmas carols during the season in leading tourist hotels, social clubs, and at residences of our well-wishers. This enables the members of the choir to derive a substantial income during the Christmas season, in addition we have been successful in getting too of our members to perform at too Abans sales outlets during the traditional new year period. This attempt too has enable those two members to derive a substantial income. At the same time our music group has been invited to perform at special events organized by different institutions. The uniforms of the Choir is black trousers and white shirts for males while the females wear a blue traditional dress. The shirts and the dress materials were donated by M/s.Shadow line ltd, and this was arranged through the courtesy of Mr. Jerald Wickremasooriya who is one of our life member. Funds to purchase the trouser materials as well as the tailoring cost of the uniforms, were donated to us by Mrs. Rayer, elder sister of our fundraising officer and life member Mr. Rienzie Benedict. We extend our sincere thank to Mr. Benedict and Mrs. Rayer for this kind gesture. Our Hony. 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Mr. Alex M. Jayawardena is in charge of our music project as well.

## Exceptional services.

Our Hony. 1<sup>st</sup> vice president Mr. Alec M. Jayawardena who is serving in the current board of officers in the federation has provided some exceptional services to some of our members. Herein we would wish to place on record three of such exceptional services performed by Mr. Jayawardena.

1. As we all know if there is a disabled child in a family he or she is entitled to their parent's pension irrespective of the age. Though there are laws enacted by parliament in this respect, one has to work hard to receive this entitlement. Our member Mrs. M.D. Somawathie is one such lady who is

entitled to her mother's pension. Anyway she had failed to get this entitlement even 13 years after her parents death. When this was brought to the notice of to our 1<sup>st</sup> vice President he acted immediately. But he was unable to trace any of the relevant papers from the concern divisional secretariat. But this could not stop Mr. Jayawardena, he managed to trace the relevant paper on the central office in Colombo for which he had to spent his personal funds. Accordingly Mrs. M.D.Somawathie is now receiving a pension of over Rs.4500/- per month and she also has succeeded in receiving arrears of pension for two years.

Our member Mr. Walter Cooray is facing the same situation as Mrs. M.D. Somawathie, and our 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Mr. Jayawardena is acting to grant redress to him as well. We are confident that Mr. Jayawardena will succeed in his attempt.

2. Once an employee is suspended from work in an institution, it is not an easy task to get re-instated, even after a disciplinary inquiry. Our deputy treasurer Mr. Rathnapala Liyanage was facing such a situation amidst financial hardship. On hearing of his plight, Mr. Jayawardena was in immediate action. He held several meetings with the manager and the board of officers of that institution by visiting Galle on several occasion spending his personal money. After striving for nearly two years Mr. Jayawardena succeeded to get Mr. Rathnapala Liyanage reinstated with arrears of salary.
3. As you know we conduct a training programme for telephone operators. Mr. Saman karunasiri is our first trainee telephone operator. But we have still not succeeded in facing him in open employment. But we have been able to place in open employment many of the trainees who joined us after Mr. Saman Karunasiri. Mr. Jayawardena, was much disturbed about this situation and has been working hard to place Mr. Saman Karuanasiri as a telephone operator in the public sector. With this objective in his mind Mr. Jayawardena has been shuttling

between the departments of Samurdhi Affairs and Poverty Relief. He has had several meetings with the Director of management in the treasury but has not succeeded as yet. But Mr. Jayawardena has not given up and we are hopeful and that he will succeed very soon. We take this opportunity to thank Mr. Jayawardena for all his endeavours.

### The Sarana Home for the Elderly Blind

The activities at the Sarana home for the elderly blind keep on progressing. Our life member Mr. Gunadasa Senanayake who is the manager of this place performs an exceptional service for which we thank him extensively. Assistant Manager Mrs. Dharmalatha too is dedicated and extends her fullest co-operation to Mr. Senanayaka for the progress of the home. During the period under review the roof and the floor of the premises have been renovated. Two modernized porches have been added to the building. The expenses for this work have been met by the Southern Provincial Council. The coconut plantation has been put up on the land belonging to the home, and by now we have been able to get the yield from same. Construction of the protective wall around the land has been completed too.

The services of Ms. Indrani, who is also a member of the staff in addition to Mr. Senanayaka and Mrs. Dharmalatha, have been made permanent. At present there are 32 residents in this home; out of them 20 are females and 12 males. A power generator for use on occasions of power failure had been along felt need for this home. We are happy that our manager Mr. Senanayake has been successful in solving this problem by now. A sum of Rs.95000/- for the purchase of power generator was donated to us by Mrs. Dotie from Switzerland and her husband Mr. Parakrama who are neighbours of the Sarana Home. We extend our gratitude to this couple for their generous gesture.

The number of request for admission to the Sarana Home is on the increase, thereby the need to add more space has become an issue that cannot be ignored. Anyway we



are happy to note that Mr. Senanayake has already taken steps in that direction. We are thankful Mr. Senanayake, Mrs. Dharmalatha and Mrs. Indrani for the dedicated work they perform to make the Sarana Home a comfortable place for the elderly blind to reside.

### **Skills Development Center for Blind women at pandulagama**

The Skills Development Center for the blind women situated at Pandulagama is also under the supervision of Mr. Alex. M. Jayawardena our Hony. 1<sup>st</sup> vice president. The activities of this center had almost collapsed during 2001, but steps were taken to rejuvenate same on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2002. The chief guest on the occasion was Mr. Berti Premalal Disanayake Hon.Chief Minister of the North central provincial council. Mr. Disanayaka is a long-standing friend of the federation. The presence of Mrs Chandra Wickremasinghe Director of Social Services in the North Central Province, on the occasion was encouraging. We are thankful to Mr. Ranjan Mahadiwulwewa , The sports officer of the north central province, for coordinating the re- organizational work of the skills development center. At present there are 8 trainees in this center and they receive training on different handicrafts.

### **Production center.**

Consequent to a request made by the federation to the visually handicapped trust fund, a production center has been established in the premises of the rehabilitation center for the disabled at Liyanagemulla, Seeduwa. Female trainees at the rehabilitation center who are orphans and are displaced, receive admission to this center. The items that they produced are sold to the public by the Social Services Ministry and the Department of Social Services. Our Hony.1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Mr. Alex. M Jayawardena too is a member of the team that supervises the activities of the production center.

## **Awareness**

With the election of a new government in December 2001, the Sri Lanka Broadcasting corporation Sinhala radio programme through which we could address the public was suspended, but we can still speak to the listeners through the "One to One" page of radio journal on the English service . Weekly and daily news papers such as "Dinamina", "Divaina", "Lankadeepa", daily news, Sunday times and island, Sunday Leader, Lanka Women, Support us by publishing information about our activities. Similarly the electronic media too has come forward to carry our message to their viewers. We are thankful to everyone who support us in creating awareness about the needs and aspiration of the blind community in this country. Our publicity officer is Mr. Rienzie Benedict who is also a life member of our federation. We circulate a Sinhala monthly publication (Sumaga) in Braille among our membership. This carries information about the various activities of the organisation. With the dawn of 2003, we got the privilege to open our own website. This facility was made available to us by Mr. Senaka Weerasooria, Managing Director/CEO of Genesiis Software Pvt. Ltd. Mr. Senaka Weerasooria is a Son of Dr. and Mrs Weerasooria who are close friends of our Hony. President. We are thankful to Dr. Weerasooria and Mrs. Weerasooria and Mr. Senaka Weerasooria for their generosity towards our federation. Our web address is [www.slfvh.org](http://www.slfvh.org)

## **Employment training and job placement**

Until 2001 the only training programme was telephone switchboard operation. But in that year we also started training our members on computer Braille printing. At the same time we have started a computer training programme as well from 2001. Some members are given training on both the telephone Switch Board and computers so that such a training can be beneficial to some of our members. We have trained 7 telephone operators since our 9<sup>th</sup> convention in 2000. Out of them

one has received training on computer Braille printing and telephone operating. At present two persons are receiving training on computer Braille printing. They are being sponsored by the "Tharuna Aruna Programme" of the Ministry of Labour. Both of them are graduates.

By now we have trained 12 persons on computer operation since the programme was launched in 2001. At the beginning this project was sponsored by the Ceylinco Sarana fund and followed by the SHIA foundation. We also provide a training in English language, so that it can be beneficial to our members when securing employment. This programme is being sponsored by The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted. The Computer and English classes are conducted during weekends only.

The paper bag making project, is also gaining popularity among our members. Reports produced by those who are engaged in this project indicate that they are deriving substantial incomes. The raw materials required for making the paper bags are provided to the members free of charge. The medical covers and envelopes making project is income generation for the individual members and the federation as well.

We have been able to place a few of our qualified members in open employment as well. During the period in review we have been successful in securing employment for three telephone operators. One of them is at the employers' federation, while the other two got employed at Abans limited. The telephone operator at the employers' federation has now been promoted as a junior executive, because she possesses computer operating skills.

We supported another member of ours to secure employment at tea and Herbs limited. Accordingly we can consider that the organization has been supportive towards its membership to be economically independent. Our placement officer Mr. Rienzie Benedict co-ordinates the collection of raw materials for the paper bags and medical covers producing project, and also the securing of employment to the membership.

## **Fundraising**

The financial strength of our federation is the key to all our successes. Since 1995 we have employed a separate officer for fundraising, job placement and public awareness. He is Mr. Rienzie Benedict, who is also a life member of the federation. He is being sponsored by the SHIA foundation, an almost all the fundraising projects launched during this period have proved to be fruitful. Attempts made to secure employment for the membership have achieved good results to a certain extent. We have launched a project to place charity tills in the branches of Cargills Foodcity limited and at the retail shops of the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment as well as at the main branches of the bank of Ceylon. We are still continuing the project to place a charity box at the Colombo international airport.

In addition to above projects our president has initiated a scheme wherein our well-wishers, each contribute Rs.1200/- per annum. This project too is gaining momentum at present.

Though we have employed a fundraising officer, members of the executive committee too have come forward to do their best in raising funds needed by the federation. M/s. Finco Limited and M/s Resources Development Consultants Limited each contributes Rs.2000/- per month to the federation, consequent to a personal appeal made to them by our Hony. President EMN Banda, JPUM. Mr. E.W. Balasooria who is a close friend of our president, too contributes Rs.15000/- monthly towards our expenses. According to Mr. Balasooria, he has made arrangements with his bankers to make this contribution so long as the federation exists. With the personal intervention of our Hony.1<sup>st</sup> vice president Mr. Alex. M. Jayawardena, the federation has succeeded in receiving a contribution of Rs.875000/- from the social services ministry of the western provincial council, out of which Rs.800000/- has gone in to a fixed deposit.

We also conduct an annual flag week. The head of this project is Mr. Alex M. Jayawardena, our Hony.1<sup>st</sup> Vice President. Flags are sold in schools, bank offices, and in

Divisional Secretariat Offices. Our patron Her Excellency, the President, Chandrika Bandaranayaka kumarathunge, issues and appeal annually, calling for support for the flag week, which has proved to be a strength to the project. We are thankful to Her Excellency for this kind gesture. The flag week is being conducted to co-incide with the annual international white cane day.

We have been successful in getting financial support from the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (NABP) to cover our annual budget deficits. Accordingly in 2000 NABP gave us Rs.87180/- for the purchase of a Photostat machine, and in 2001 and 2002 a sum of Rs.665000/- and 694885/- respectively, to meet our office expenses. We are hopeful to receive NABP assistance for the year 2003 as well. A project proposal in this regard has already been submitted.

## **Braille**

There is, no doubt, that Braille is the most popular method of communication among the blind. We stress that the federation gives priority to improve the skill of reading and writing in Braille among our members. The majority of students use Perkins Braille writers. Until recently, one could not by locally, spare parts to repair Perkins brailers. But as a result of a request made by the federation to the world blind union we have received a consignment of Perkins brailler spare parts worth Rs.4,50,000/-. The idea of the project is for the federation to sell these spare parts and to utilized the funds so raised for the continuation of the project.

Later Day Saint Charities, Uta USA has donated to us 30 Perkins brailers the cost of which is Rs.1.3 million approximately. It has been decided to give a few of this machines to two Universities, as part of our contributions to support the education of our young members. However, the ownership of this machines will remain with the federation while repairs will be done under our supervision.

Further the NABP has donated to us 10 German- made Braille writers the cost of which is approximately Rs.270,000/-. However, our students are not much in favour of using these machines. Therefore, it has been decided to sell them to those who wish to buy and to use the funds to strengthen the Braille project.

We are aware of the difficulties faced by the blind to obtain items like Braille slate etc. locally. In order to solve this problem we have launched a project to import such items from India to meet the local demand. The ABU has supported us to make available locally such items that are useful for the blind in their daily living. A sample consignment of such items is already available and arrangements will be made to import and supply them on request. Activities relating to the Braille section are being supervised by our Hony. Deputy Secretary Mr. K.W. Dewadasa.

### **Youth organization.**

Elections to the youth association took place in 2001 and 2003. On both occasions Mr. Nishantha Mendis was elected as its president. During this period the youth association has conducted several workshops including one on family Planning. They conducted a lottery to accumulate funds for its activities. The youth association is a limb of the SLFVH. The resource person to the youth association is our Hony. 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Mr. Alex. M. Jayawardena.

### **The National Forum of Blind Women**

This is also a wing of the federation. In 2002, the national forum of the blind women held its elections and Mrs. Monika Shiranthi Peiris was elected as the new President. During the period in review, the women's forum conducted several leadership training workshops, and one of them was financially supported by the women's committee of the ABU. Workshops on personal grooming and healthcare too

have been conducted. A lottery among friends and a flag week were conducted to raise funds for the forum in 2001 and 2003 respectively. Members of the forum went on excursions in 2001 and 2003.

### **Death Assistance Unit.**

By the time of our 9<sup>th</sup> convention 356 of our members had enrolled in the death assistance scheme of the federation. By the end of May 2003 the membership had rising to 435. During the period of this report six members had died and a sum of Rs.43000/- has been paid as funeral expenses to them. Further, during this period one spouse of a member and twenty six dependents of the members had expired and a sum of Rs.73,000/- has been paid as compensation to them. This unit is of immense benefit to our members who face economic difficulties on bereavement .

### **Sports Activities**

The SLFVH, according to its ability, strives to improve the sporting skills of its membership. The SLFVH is affiliated to the national federation of sports for the disabled, and our Hony. 1<sup>st</sup> vice president Mr. Alex. M. Jayawardena functions in the capacity of 1<sup>st</sup> vice president in the sport federation as well. Our member Mrs Sandhya Nilanthi was given financial support to participate in the pacific games for the disabled held in South Korea in 2002. She succeeded in winning a Silver medal in the hundred meters and a bronze medal in the long jump event. Mrs Sandhya Nilanthi is thus eligible to participate in the Para-Olympics due to be held in Athens, Greece, in 2004. We shall make every endeavour to find a sponsor for her.

### **Braille Library.**

In 2002 the federation succeeded in establishing its own Braille library. The project was sponsored by the Sri

Lankan Christian Association in London which provided funds for the furniture and the production of braille books. It was officially open on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2002, with Mrs. Charmaine Jayathilake, founder President and present Vice President of the association, as the Chief guest. At present 13 of our members are engaged in the production of braille books and by now there are over 90 Sinhala titles in the library.

At the same time we have received a request from Shri Jayawardenapura University to transcribe in to Braille 68 text books required for its blind students. Steps have already been taken to accede to this request which will generate funds for the Braille project.

### **Talking Book library**

We are happy to state that the SLFVH has its own talking book library as well. The main funding for this project has been received from technique international, a school of fashion and, on their recommendation, from the Australian High Commission in Colombo. This library was ceremonially opened on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2002 with Mr. Devid Binns, the Australian High Commissioner as the Chief Guest. We are thankful to Mrs. Gwendoline Kuhatheva Managing Director of technique international for her strenuous efforts to make this project a success.

### **Prevention of Blindness Project**

This project is a dream come true for our Hony. President Mr.E.M.Nawaratne Banda, JPUM. The basic equipment for this project was donated to us by Mr. Nihal Bogahalade the former President of Rotary Club of Colombo west, who is also a friend of our president. The Rotary Club of Colombo West received the equipment from Swedish Oredro Westra Rotarian. The total cost of the equipment donated is around Rs.3 million. For a start weekly testing clinic are conducted under the supervision and guidance of Mrs. Rohini Weerasooria, who is also a member of our



advisory board. Members of the Sri Lanka Optometrists' association have volunteered to do the eye testing. By now a considerable number of patients have been issued with free spectacles while several others have been directed for free cataract operation. We extend our sincere gratitude to the members of Rotary Club of Colombo West for their generosity, as well as to Mrs. Weerasooria and members of the Sri Lanka Optometrists' Association for their dedication to make this project a success.

### **District Branches of the Federatrion**

Presently the SLFVH consists of 9 branches. The latest to be established is the Ratnapura District branch. According to our constitution, presidents of the district branches are ex-officio members of the executive committee of the federation. As a whole, during the period in review, the district branches have achieved considerable progress. They have succeeded in providing many useful services to the membership. Members of the Galle branch have succeeded in setting up their own office. All the districts have conducted social gatherings for members, and also carried out essay competitions, welfare services and awareness programmes. Gampaha district has succeeded in securing employment opportunities for some of its members. On the whole all the districts endeavour to make life better for their members.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2003, a leadership training workshop was conducted for all the district officials. Lecturers for this workshop came from the Social Development Institute of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Plan Implementation. Funds were provided by (Swedish Organisation of Disabled Persons International Aid Association Sri Lanka (SHIA) office in Colombo.

## **Inter-Organisational Relationships.**

The Visually Handicapped Trust Fund (VHTF) that had been established on a suggestion made by the SLFVH, has progressed rapidly. Services such as self-employment grants, housing assistance, and scholarships are being provided by this trust fund, and the SLFVH has succeeded in getting support for some of its projects as well. First Vice President Mr. Alex M Jayawardena and the General Secretary Mr.R.A. Sirisena function as the two delegates in the board of the VHTF. During the period in review this fund has granted approximately Ru.100,000/- for restructuring and reorganizing our skills development center situated at pandualagam, Anuradhapura. We have also succeeded in getting approval to recruit one visually handicapped telephone operator and one assistant handloom textile weaving instructor for the rehabilitation center at Seeduwa. We have already been successful in having a Music Instructor appointed on a temporary basis to that center, also with the approval of the visually handicapped trust fund board. We are hoping to make this post permanent in the near future. All these positions have been created specifically for visually handicapped persons. These achievements have been made as a result of the close co-operation and understanding that exist between the slfvh and the members of the VHTF .

The advice and guidance that we receive from the SHIA foundation is of great value to the slfvh. Similarly the financial assistance given by SHIA goes a long way towards strengthening our movement. We are thankful to Mr. G. Wanniarachchi, national coordinating officer of SHIA, and his staff for the co-operation we receive from them. When attending meetings convened by SHIA, the slfvh has been able to express its independent views. Since 1995 the SHIA foundation has been sponsoring the salary of our Job Placement and Fund Raising Officer. In addition SHIA has been providing funds to implement previous activities in our annual plan of action.

Further the slfvh works in close co-operation with the Ministry of Social Services, the Department of Social Services and different Civil organizations with a view to

bring about a better life for the visually handicapped community in this country.

Recently we got the opportunity to build up a close relationship with the Kalutara Bodhimaga Padanama, through its Secy. Mrs. Chitra De Abrew Mendis. She was introduced to us by Mrs. Violet Yakandawala, Secretary, to the National Blind Women's Forum of the Federation. It is a wish of Mrs Chitra Mendis and the Bodhimaga Padanama to transcribe in to Braille the " Dhammapada" and similar books on Buddhism. We have agreed to co-operate with the Bodhimaga Padanama to achieve these objectives.

A close and cordial relationship exist between the Sri Lanka Council for the Blind & the SLFVH. The Secretary/Executive Director of the Sri Lanka Council for the Blind, is also a life member of the federation. He is always prepared to give us good advice and guidance whenever we are in need.

### **International relationships**

Internationally the SLFVH has a cordial relationship with the "World Blind Union". The consignment of Perkins Braille Spare Parts, donated recently by the WBU has proved to be a great asset to us. Through the affiliation with the WBU we get to know other national and international organizations. But the most important factor is to continue our membership in the WBU by paying its annual dues, which we do promptly.

It is necessary to report that the SLFVH maintains a close link with the "Asian Blind Union". The permanent Secretariat of the ABU, which was in Colombo till the year 2000 was shifted to New Delhi India in 2001 according to a decision taken by its General Assembly. Our current General Secretary Mr. R.A. Sirisena still functions as the Treasurer of the ABU. He was first elected to this position in year 1992. The fact that our general secretary is also the treasurer of the ABU has proved to be beneficial to our organization. The ABU has sponsored several workshop and seminars during this period. In 2002, we got the opportunity to send two of our members to New Delhi,

India to participate in a five- day leadership training programme organised by the ABU. Our life member Mr. R.M.H.P. Gunarathne, attorney-at- law has being appointed to the human rights committee of ABU. Two meetings of the ABU Officers' were held in Colombo in 2001 & 2003.

A close relationship between the NABP and the SLFVH exists from 1997. Still we have not been able to sign an agreement for bi- lateral co-operation though several attempts were made in that direction. We feel that the unsatisfactory situation which prevails in our country can be a major obstacle in this regard. As there is some semblance of peace prevailing in this country we hope that the Norwegian government will consider our appeal positively. The former international director of NABP Mr. Arne Husveg when on retirement in February 2002. We are thankful to him for the co-operation extended to us during his tenure. The current International Affairs Director to the NABP is Mr. Arnt Holte. We take this opportunity to thank Ms. Elisabeth Oksum Asia Director on NABP for her understanding and support to the SLFVH.

### **Executive Board**

During the period in review 29 ordinary meetings and 3 special meetings of the executive board were held. One general meeting took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2002.

### **Our Appreciations**

There are many individuals and institutions who have supported the SLFVH during this period. First and for most our special thanks go to our Patron Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumarathunga for her unstinted support for strengthening the SLFVH. In 2000, 2001 and 2002 she was kind enough to issue us with messages calling for support from the public for the successful conduct of our flag weeks.

we also take this opportunity to thank the Hony. Minister of Social Services Mr. Ravindrea Samaraweere, his

Secretary, Mrs V. Jegarasasingam, Additional Secretary Mr. W.H.W. Soysa, Senior Assistant Secretary, Besil Fernando and the rest of the staff at the Ministry for the co-operation and support extended to us. The Director to the National Secretariat for the Persons with Disabilities, the Director, Additional Director, the Deputy Director, and the Assistant Director of the Department of Social Services receive our thanks for being with us in our efforts to bring about a better life to the visually handicapped community in this country. We take this opportunity to thank the Chair Person and members of the Visually Handicapped Trust Fund Board to the support we received from them when working as a team for the well being of our members. We are also thankful to all those individuals and institutions both local and abroad for the strength and courage we received from them towards our activities.

Finally we take this opportunity to thank the members of our staff at our head quarters, the textile weaving center and the Sarana home for the elderly blind for their dedicated work with out which we could not have achieved any of the above mentioned successes. At times they have sacrificed their personal their leave and holidays in order to support the executive board in delivering services to the membership. The Administrative Secretary Mrs. Shirani Perera gives excellent leadership to her team of staff. We are deeply thankful to them for their dedication to support the federation to achieving its noble objectives. As General Secretary, I wish to take this opportunity to thank our president and the members of the executive board and also the general membership for their co-operation and support to contribute my share of responsibility towards the progress of the federation.

R.A. Sirisena – Hony. General Secretary.  
SLFVH.

R.A.S / K.