

Sri Lanka 2018 Travel report Sieni and Mirjam

On Thursday, April 26, we flew to Sri Lanka. I did not think that this would be possible after my hospitalizations of the past year. The flights were heavy. The aircraft, during outward and return journeys, were jam-packed. As a result, we had little room to move, which is disastrous and makes the journey last extra long. But, once landed in Sri Lanka, you, fortunately, quickly forget this. The warmth of the climate and the people immediately overwhelmed us. It felt good and familiar. By our arrival at the hotel we were immediately invited to the light ritual and greeted warmly by everyone. A great welcome again!



After a few days of acclimatization and unwinding in our hotel, we left for the north on **Tuesday 1 May**. Fr. Seger, and his driver Praba, picked us up in the morning in the hotel with a van from OMI. Fr. Seger is now coordinator of the projects. He guided us all week, together with his driver, to visit the different projects. We also drove through the old capital Anuradhapura. It is a holy city for Buddhists because there is the tree under which the Buddha found his Enlightenment. We also visited the big stupa with its wall full of elephants.



After a long journey we arrived in Vavuniya at night. We stayed one night in the OMI house there where we met several Fathers, including Fr. Ramesh, who coordinated our projects last year. Last year we stayed here too. It felt very familiar.



The next day, **Wednesday, May 2**, we traveled to Killinochchi, to the OMI guest house, called "Annai Illam". We stayed there most of the time, as we used to do with Cor. It is a beautiful place. On the site there is a pre-school, which we visited. The schoolchildren liked our visit.

In the afternoon we visited the Youth Empowerment Center (YEC), a training school for young people. Last year we opened this center. After being warmly received by Fr. Philip and his students, as always, the ceremony began with the traditional light ritual. One of the students welcomed us with a beautiful speech. After this, songs were sung by Fr. Philip and the students and there was dancing. A number of students played



on musical instruments, which were bought with the money collected by the students of MBO Landstede, Raalte. Great to see and hear all this. So much fun. And lots of talent!



The center is already too small. Many students have signed in. They now work with three different groups in one room. They very much wish to have 3 more classrooms in which they also want to start with a specific girls project, named 'Bridal Care'. The girls then learn everything that has to do with a wedding, from make up, making wedding bouquets to baking cakes etc. The wedding is the most important moment in the life of a girl. There is enough space to realize this. Now all we have to do is get the finance for this new project. Who has an idea?



We brought four Apple laptops from Micha Schraven www.edutwin.nl from which we handed over two of it to Fr. Philip for the YEC. They were all very happy with this gift.

Thursday, May 3, we visited the orphanage home "Anna's Home" in Mankulam. The Good Shepherd Sisters and the girls were already waiting for us. There we were allowed to 'open' the living room. After cutting a ribbon and opening the door, the girls ran in. For them it was for the first time. They were very enthusiastic and immediately started playing with the different games.

The room is beautifully refurbished and nicely decorated in two parts, a part for the younger girls and a part for the older girls. Super to see this! The TV still had to be hung up.



Outside we watched the showers that are not yet finished, but they are working hard to get this also ready soon. There is a safe wall all around, the well has been renewed and a tower has been built for the water tank. The installation work still has to be done and the doors, washbasins and the like have yet to be placed. We



have seen that the collected money, by the pupils of De Horizon in Raalte, by Mirjam herself with her walks, by the Johan Wind Price, by the Old Cash Register and through the proceeds of the supermarkets, are well spent here.

In the kitchen, which we opened last year, they are improving the ventilation system, because it did not work properly.



We had received sports shirts from a parent of a student of school 'De Horizon' which we distributed to the girls. They immediately went to play volleyball in these shirts. Also the volleyball team has been given the name 'Horizon'!



It was good to be here again and to see all what has happened in one year. A beautiful outdoor space with play equipment, a volleyball court with a net, a living room where the girls can relax. They are already well on their way with good and decent shower and toilet facilities and a washing machine has been purchased.



Friday, May 4 we traveled to Jaffna and had a conversation with Fr. Edwin, the Provincial head, and with Fr. Viktor, the financial man of OMI. We discussed the various projects, especially with regard to finances, and made a number of agreements about current and forthcoming projects and about the rules for it in the Netherlands.



Then we bought a music installation in the city as a gift from HAVONOS for the opening of the apprenticeship farm. At the end of the afternoon we drove to Iyakachchi. There we opened the new building.

By our arrival, we were met by a music corps of very young children, dressed in beautiful red costumes, and a large group of people (including widows, children, OMI-Fathers and other guests) and we were given flowers and walked to the building in parade.



After the light ritual, a number of speeches, with in between music and dance, Sieni and Mirjam opened the building and unveiled a picture of the donor of the ground. Fr. Edwin blessed the building and afterwards we were able to view the center. We have lots of respect for the children who attended the opening, who had to sit still and listen for a long time. The children received a school backpack from OMI with a pen from Havonos. Unfortunately it was already dark and we were not able to view the stables and animals properly. Mirjam, together with Fr. Avelin, still walked to the stables. It is mpressive what has been realized here and how the production and sales process is getting under way. A lot of work has been done in one year.

On **Saturday, May 5**, we visited Kokilai where we were very warmly received by Fr. Jeeva. After a cup of tea with a delicacy we went to the community house "Amathy Kalam". The children were patiently waiting for us. Here too we were allowed to make an opening ceremony, this time the classrooms. They call it "Cor's Block".



We commemorated Cor by lit candles at his photo and stood still with him. This was a very special and emotional moment.

The children had prepared a beautiful program. One of the children talked everything together. Speeches were held by Fr. Seger and Fr. Jeeva and there were songs for us, music and dance. Very well done.



After this we went back to the house of Fr. Jeeva for a lunch. To honor the tradition, we did a ride on the engine of Fr. Jeeva, Sieni one way and Miriam another. It was beautiful.



After dinner we spoke with Fr. Seger and Fr. Jeeva about the situation. There must be more assistance to put everything back on track in that project.

Our last night in Killinochchi. How wonderful it was to sit together in the evening under a beautiful starry sky to have a drink together and talk with each other.



Sunday, May 6. Saying goodbye to Annai Illam. What a nice stay we had here. Fr. Philip, and his help Tambi, and Fr. Sutharsan took care of the food for us every day. It was delicious and every time they took into account our eating habits and taste.

Then there was a long journey to Mullikulam. Especially the last part was terrible. It was a bumpy sand road full of potholes.



Suddenly there was a new pickup with a priest and children along the side of the road. This was Fr. Harance, who was waiting for us with some children, whom he had just picked up with the pick-up. What a surprise.

We were hung on flowers and embraced by everyone. Miriam went with the children in the pick-up and some of them boarded with Sieni. This is the new truck financed by Havnos and Wilde Ganzen. It is used to bring products to the market and to sell them there. The children who live far away are also picked up for school and brought back, and people are taken to the doctor or the hospital. What an experience and what a pleasure again!



Arriving at the "Sieco community house", we were welcomed with the light ritual and a dot on our forehead. After having installed ourselves in our guest room and having a rest, we met the board of the community center. They expressed their happiness with the truck and gratefulness for everything that Havonos has done and still is doing for them. They were really very happy that we made the difficult trip to pay them a visit. Also there was a new wish: an ambulance for transporting sick people to the city.



The 200 children were receiving lessons during our lunch. In groups they were reading, writing and discussing on the ground. They do not have furniture. Handsome, they can manage it anyway. It is understandable that tables with chairs are also a wish. After lunch Fr.

Harance still addressed us and the children, without



being prepared, sang and danced for us. Very nice. All children received a pen and Fr. Harance received a laptop from Micha. After the children went home we admired the garden. It looked fine. All kinds of crops are being grown there and quite a few are being harvested, even peanuts.

Very nice to see that the palm trees that we planted in memory of Cor last year, are growing. After a pleasant evening together we went to bed for our last night in the North of Sri Lanka.

On **Monday 7 May**, we left again after breakfast. First we looked at the water pumps and filters financed by Havonos and SEHH at the community house and the school next door in Mullikulam.



How wonderful to see that clean and safe drinking water comes out of the tap. That was different last year, when we only saw a well with terribly polluted water that made the children sick. Superb that such an important project could be realized.



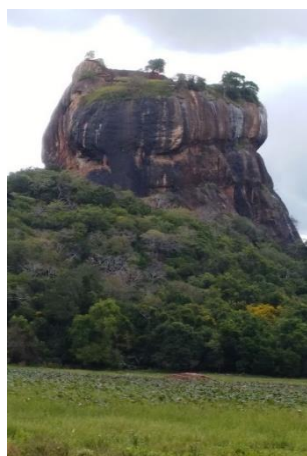
After this we started the long journey back to Negombo. On the way to Madhu, a place of pilgrimage, we visited the church where the statue of Our Lady of Madhu is worshiped. The image offers protection, especially against snake bites. And that is quite common in rural Sri Lanka.

Around half past 10 in the evening we finally arrived at our hotel Goldi Sands, in Negombo. We just drunk something with each other before Fr. Seger and Fr. Harance with Praba continued to Colombo. And yes, then we had to say goodbye and that did not really worked well out for us all. After all, we spent a whole week intensively together and experienced many beautiful and impressive things.

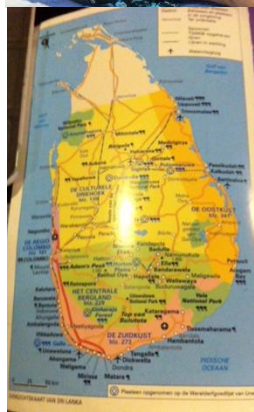


Yet Fr. Seger the next day returned to the hotel with Dayana to say again hello to us. That was a surprise. We know Dayana, just like Fr. Seger, from the first hour. Anyway, everything comes to an end and we can look back on another great and fruitful visit to the different projects. What a great feeling and what an energy this gives! With so many beautiful memories in our minds we had a wonderful week in this hotel and could give all these impressions a place. Hence we have undertaken actions together or separately from each other. We went for a day

to the Golden Temple of Dambulla, the climb of the Lion Rock by Mirjam and Kumar and Sieni with Suresh in the tuktuk around the mountain. A tour in Sigiriya and the game drive in Minneriya National Parc. Elephants spotted, of which one was very pregnant. What a size!



In Goldi Sands, at the swimming pool, we had great contact with 2 Dutch families from 's Gravendeel, also infected with the 'Sri Lanka virus'. With them, Sieni has celebrated Mother's Day. Mirjam was with our lifeguard Kumar and his family. We got a delicious cappuccino and had lunch together, while all kinds of ideas were put forward. We will see what comes of it.



What shocked us a lot during our conversations, is that these people wanted to visit the north but that they were strongly advised against it! It would still be very unsafe. This is absolutely not true and unjustified. All roadblocks, barriers and checkpoints have disappeared.

There also appears to be travel organizations that are negative about the north and even in some travel guides the north is a blind spot, as if no people live there. It's unbelievable! This is precisely where urgent help is needed, this population has lived in oppression for so long and is the most devastated part of Sri Lanka due to the tsunami and the years of war.

A visit to the local beach, beautiful, where they go to the sea with all their clothes.



On Saturday we were invited by our taxi driver for a BBQ. We had been given asparagus from Henk and Florentina de Weerd for the taxi drivers Suresh and Chiran, who kept the asparagus in the freezer. Miriam and Sieni cooked the asparagus for them that evening. They all enjoyed it. It was a fun and enjoyable evening.



On **Monday 14 May** in the morning we left for the Netherlands after 19 wonderful days. Saying farewell again was heavy? Fortunately, we still have the photos and we can look back on a fantastic journey.

Hopefully we will be back next year.

Goodbye Sri Lanka!