



On Friday 9 May 2025, Sieni and I left for Schiphol Airport with lots of extra luggage, bound for Sri Lanka.

We were going to visit many projects run by the Havonos Foundation (Heart for North-East Sri Lanka). After a long and tiring journey, we arrived in Sri Lanka the next day. Upon arrival, the heat enveloped us like a warm blanket. As with our previous trip, the taxi was not equipped to handle our luggage, so we had to wait for a larger car. When we arrived at the hotel, the staff were waiting for us and greeted us with flower garlands and freshly squeezed drinks. This time too, we were asked to perform the familiar welcome ceremony of lighting the candle to symbolise spreading light and warmth. It was a beautiful ceremony. We were given our own rooms

by the pool, which was a lovely spot in the garden. It felt like 'coming home' again.

On Tuesday 13 May, Father Ramesh and Amal visited our hotel. It was a warm reunion. The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, we drove north. En route, we saw lots of animals walking on the roads, as usual:



cows, dogs and goats. Not to mention the hustle and bustle of all the hectic traffic driving and honking. All in all, it was a long and tiring journey.

We arrived at the Oblates Technical Centre (OPTEC) in Kilinochchi in the evening. After greeting everyone and settling into our rooms, we enjoyed a delicious noodle meal. The following afternoon, we went to Kokilai, home to the Havonos community centre. There are various activities there Such as English, math, music etc. The children gave us a warm welcome. They were waiting for us outside with beautiful lotus flowers. In the classroom, the boys and girls sat separately from each other. Father Ramesh asked if they would like to perform for us, perhaps by singing or reciting a poem. It was wonderful to see how hard they tried.

In the afternoon, we went to a village we visited last year, where there is extreme poverty. It's hard to imagine how they live without decent housing, electricity, or sanitation. Together with Wilde Ganzen, Havonos was able to built a washing facility and to install a well with a water filter to provide clean drinking water. Now, the women and children no longer have to walk so far to safely wash themselves and fetch water. Sieni and I were honored to open this facility.

Saturday, 17 May. It had rained heavily and thundered during the night. Many trees had fallen, and there were large puddles of water. We were expected at CPR at 9:30 a.m. (Centre for Peace and Reconciliation) It is also located on the grounds where we are staying. Today, we are here to hand out certificates to a group of women in recognition of their embroidery and sewing work. For most of them, this is the first diploma they have ever received. We walked through the rain and mud to the main building. Many women were already waiting for the official welcome ceremony. When we entered the room, it was full of women beautifully dressed in their traditional clothing. We were greeted with applause and asked to take our seats at the front of the room. After speeches by Fathers Ramesh and Vincent, we were allowed to hand out the certificates. Everyone was so happy and proud to receive their diplomas, and rightly so!



Afterwards, we drove to the new project for deaf and deaf-mute people. The proceeds from the Havonos anniversary celebration will go towards helping these people learn a trade and earn a living. They are severely discriminated against and feel like they don't belong anywhere. The men and women were very enthusiastic and happy to have the opportunity to contribute to society. Everyone was given the opportunity to express what they would like to learn and do. The range of responses included sewing and embroidery, woodworking, carpentry and computers. It is wonderful to be able to help this group of people and give them hope for the future.



On Sunday, May 18, we make our way to the YEC (Youth Empowerment Centre).

This is a centre where young people, often traumatized by war, can receive vocational training. When we arrived, crowds of women were waiting for us in rows. They were wearing beautiful orange saris, which they had made themselves during the six-month course. Here too, we were greeted with the familiar welcome ceremony.

Afterwards, we went to the building where the courses are given. Sieni and I first had to cut a beautiful ribbon to open the exhibition. In this room were beautiful (fake) cakes, decorated

with icing, just like the real thing. The Aari work (embroidery) and all kinds of sewing projects were also beautifully displayed. We couldn't believe our eyes. The Ari work was magnificent, with all those tiny beads

and mirrors... It was amazing to see how much they had learned in just six months. It was certainly worth a certificate, and the students were incredibly happy and proud; they had never received a diploma before. A number of women had even taken and passed all three courses, which is very impressive!

Later on, we went to the large hall in the main building, where all the women were seated. At the entrance,



there were two beautiful ladies dressed in traditional saris. Vasini, the daughter of Justin and Praba, was also there. Before the graduation ceremony began, Fr Ramesh and Provincial Fr Jay gave a speech. It was incredibly hot.... Afterwards, there was more singing and dancing, which was impressive. What a difference from our farmers' clog dance! Then came the official part: the presentation of certificates to the students. A photo was taken at each individual presentation. According to Fr. Ramesh, these photos will soon be on display in many homes!



Once everyone had received their diplomas, Sieni was invited to cut the beautiful homemade cake. Sieni and I were then called forward to receive the 'Golden Garment Award' in recognition of our exceptional service. It was truly humbling. We are incredibly proud of Fr. Ramesh. In just over six months, he has managed to breathe new life into the YEC — an amazing feat. His enthusiasm, charisma, faith and love for his fellow man enable him to reach and help so many people. Even the Provincial was impressed by the whole event. He also paid Fr Ramesh a big compliment. It was another special and impressive day.

Today is **Monday, 19 May**, and we are visiting the pre-school in Mulankavil. Upon arrival, we saw that the



school had been neatly painted in bright orange. The children were waiting for us at the gate, holding musical instruments and beautiful flowers. We followed the music inside, accompanied by the sound of blowing horns and beating drums. The noise was enough to make anyone happy. The chairs had been set up for us and the children were dressed as sunflowers for a special dance. They were so small, yet danced so well to the beat — each one was more graceful than the next. We watched with admiration and emotion, and gave them a big round of applause! The teachers had two requests: a water filter for clean drinking water and some plastic chairs for the parents.

Tuesday, 20 May. Today, we are visiting Fr. Jenistan and Fr. Vincent's farm in Iyakachchi. This teaching/working farm covers 50 hectares, quite large it is. We were given a tour of the fields. We started with the vegetables and peanuts. I had never seen peanuts like these before. The Germans call them earthnuts because they grow underground, and rightly so. Currently, there are 500 palm trees, which are expected to generate a good income in the future: there is high demand for coconuts. Next, we walked to see the animals: chickens, goats and so on. The stables looked fresh and clean. Everything is mucked out and hosed down every morning. It was lovely to see how lovingly Fr. Jenistan treats all the animals. Unfortunately, thieves had stolen turkeys again that night, destroying the barbed wire fence in the process.

A new project has been added to the farm: brickmaking. There were already quite a few bricks drying in the sun. These bricks are now being used to build a sturdy new fence at the front of the farm. An obvious use,



given the events of that night. After that, they will be sold to a construction company. Fr. Jenistan is really in his element here, but he is far too busy. Fortunately, he will soon be getting some more help.

On Wednesday 21 May, our last day in Kilinochchi, we had the chance to relax. In the evening, we went out for dinner with the priests that Sieni has worked over the years. The meal was delicious, and we had a pleasant evening.

Thursday, 22 May. We were all ready and packed by 9 am. After saying an emotional goodbye to everyone, our first stop was to visit a group of deaf women. We gave them two electric sewing machines, along with all the necessary materials. These had been purchased using money from the Havonos anniversary party, to which Wilde Ganzen had contributed. After driving many kilometres, we arrived at a building that used to be a factory. The women sat ready with a sign language interpreter who translated everything. Some of the women knew a little sign language or had taught themselves some signs, while others could only lipread. They will soon learn real sign language from a teacher who has volunteered to teach them.





They told us how they had become deaf. This was very impressive! Some people became deaf during the war due to bombs, while others lost their hearing at birth, in an accident or for family reasons, such as cousins marrying each other. Then the truck arrived in the yard, carrying the sewing machines. The machines and their accessories were unloaded into the building. The women were incredibly moved and enthusiastic! They told us how often they had been discriminated against and humiliated because of their deafness. They said that it was wonderful that we, from the Netherlands, were helping them. Seeing their joy touched us too, and we were happy we could help them.

Afterwards, we drove straight to Negombo. This was another long and tiring journey! We didn't arrive at the hotel until 8 p.m., but fortunately, we were still able to have dinner there together.



Thursday, 29 May: Ascension Day. That evening, Fr Ramesh, Amal and Fr Jeeva met us again at the hotel. They were on their way back from Colombo, where they had attended a meeting. We enjoyed a delicious dinner together. After coffee, they left, and the inevitable farewells were very emotional. After waving them off, we settled down on the terrace for a drink. We had just started to enjoy our drinks when, suddenly, a huge whirlwind swept over us. We asked the waiting staff if it was safe. Well, it wasn't. Large roof panels and all kinds of other things flew through the air with a terrible noise! Terrified, we ran back into the restaurant with the

wheelchair and found a safe haven. We were soaked and covered in sand that had been blown in from the beach.

Everyone was so helpful and kind to one another. We were offered new drinks and towels to dry ourselves off. Once the wind had died down, we walked back to our rooms. The next morning, boy, what a mess! The ground was covered with all sorts of things. Roof panels were lying in front of our cottage, in the garden and in the swimming pool! Fortunately, there were no guests staying in the part of the hotel where the roof had disappeared.

Had this happened a little earlier, when we were waving goodbye to Fr Ramesh, Amal and Jeeva, we could



have been hit on the head by those slabs! Fortunately, however, we were protected — we must have had a guardian angel watching over us! We heard that severe weather had hit Colombo and the surrounding area. Many people were left homeless, and enormous damage had been caused by uprooted trees, flooding and destroyed houses. We had planned to take a trip to Galle that day, but it was impossible due to all the destruction. It was a shame, but at least we were safe. We stayed at the hotel for the last few days. On 1 June, our last day, the builders had just finished renovating the roof.

These were another three unforgettable weeks in Sri Lanka. This time, the trip was very different from the first, when everything was new and exciting. But this time was just as valuable, with a sense of recognition and of feeling 'at home'. This was especially true of the people you now know and who have become dear to you. Sieni and I share the same mission. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country with varied landscapes, including the sea, beaches, jungle, tea and rice fields.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of poverty, especially in the north, the former war zone.

Havonos is such a wonderful foundation, helping everyone, regardless of background or religion. Based on the idea that you are a human being who needs help. It's so wonderful that you can give a little hope for the future through all the projects that have been set up and are running. Isn't that great! I am happy and grateful I know Havonos, it makes me happy...