

# Effective use of tour guiding in countering Tamil Diaspora: an open source response to LTTE sympathizers

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**Abstract**— *Nations in the modernity are more towards the use of efficacious tool of 'strategic communication' on achieving their propaganda goals. 'Public diplomacy' is a part of strategic communication which is an alternative process to traditional diplomacy. Every government needs to develop a public diplomacy arm to address target audiences in order to deliver its national narrative.*

*The recent military defeat created bewilderment in the LTTE friendly Tamil Diaspora and created problems for their existence. Since then the LTTE strategy was changed and the usage of media and cyberspace increased against the Sri Lankan national interest. Sri Lanka is a tourist destination. There are many visitors coming to Sri Lanka from those countries where LTTE operate their propaganda mechanism. The author perceives tour guiding as an area with a significant potential to send across a countering message to the communities of those countries. An effective tour guide has the ability to become the most reliable and friendly individual to the tourists in a strange land. He who wins the hearts and minds of his clients will be able to convey a more grass root level idea about his motherland with a credible sense.*

*This paper intends to discuss the constructive role that tour guides can play in building Sri Lankan image in International arena. The author suggests seeking ideas from the stakeholders in tourism industry and defence and foreign policy makers in order to build a national narrative for Sri Lanka. The methodology of the paper will be based on a qualitative approach by analyzing the opinions and experiences of tour guides and other relevant stakeholders. The outcome of this paper would open new avenues in countering anti Sri Lankan propaganda.*

**Keywords**— **Public diplomacy, Strategic communicant, Tour guiding**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism sector of Sri Lanka was badly affected due to the prolonged conflict for over last three decades. All stakeholders expected to have a rapid development in tourism industry in the post conflict period. As everybody expected, the entire sector has been experiencing a growth in both terms of number of arrivals and bringing foreign exchange revenue Sri Lanka. Tourist arrivals reached one million for the year 2012 and it recorded a growth of 17%

over the year – 2011 (855,957), over one billion (US\$) of earnings for the year 2012 and have increased by 16% compared to year 2011 (BOI: 2013)

Sri Lanka is aiming to become a hub in Asia. The government expects the tourism Industry to become one of the key industries on its way towards the expected goal. The government is also optimistic about getting more foreign direct investments (FDI) to develop the leisure sector.

Sri Lanka was a popular destination in the Western European Market. Even during the height of the civil conflict Western Europe produced well for Sri Lanka and The United Kingdom (UK) Germany and France were the countries that generated higher number of visitors. The spending capacities of these tourists were better than tourists coming from other parts of the world and they created a considerable amount of direct and indirect employment. Even though there is a gradual increase after the conflict, the Western European market did not boom as expected by the industry stakeholders. Attracting tourists from Europe has become an extra difficult task for Sri Lankan travel agents due to LTTE Diaspora's anti- Sri Lanka propaganda campaign targeting the tourist industry. New assemblages of terror, seek to inflict defame on Sri Lanka to avenge the defeat of the LTTE. This new threat is very clearly trying to disconnect or unplug Sri Lanka from being a hub. These efforts aim at pushing Sri Lanka towards isolation within International Community, and this seems to be the preferred national defeat desired by the enemy.

It is academically inspiring to conduct a study as to how to counter the said propaganda carried out by the Diaspora groups whose sole intention is to tarnish the image of Sri Lanka and to create a bad reputation as a 'not safe' destination to visit. By doing so, the LTTE expect two outcomes.

1. To hinder the in-flow of foreign income to services exports sector of the Sri Lankan national income, which will be a crucial factor for the growth of country's Gross National Product (GNP). This will result in the decline of investments and also hinder the sustainable development process of the country.

2. To stop the foreign audiences from experiencing the post war government development process and its successes. If

the tourists get to know the truth they will not support the LTTE activities in the west. That will be a bad blow for smooth running of the financial regimes of the LTTE in the west.

#### A. The LTTE Diaspora

*Kumaran Pathmanathan* alias KP was appointed by the LTTE as their leader after the demise of *Velupillai Pirabakaran* in the final battle. Sri Lankan security forces were able to apprehend KP in Malaysia and subsequently the LTTE was fractured into four factions. They are:

1. Nethiyavan faction which is run by Periyampnayagam Sivaparan operating from Oslo, Norway
2. Fr. Joe Emmanuel faction also known as the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) based in London, UK
3. Vishwanathan Rudrakumaran faction which is running Transnational government of Tamil Ealam (TGTE) from New York, USA
4. Vinayagam faction which is also known as the Head Quarters (HQ) group operating from Paris, France

The aforesaid Diaspora based LTTE groups are funding anti-Sri Lanka campaigns and using lobby companies to tarnish the image of Sri Lankan government. One of their main objectives is to destroy Sri Lankan tourism industry in order to hinder the growth of the economy. The website titled *Sri Lanka-think again* campaign run by the LTTE friendly Diaspora in the UK, France and Spain advise the foreign audiences not to visit Sri Lanka.

*“Sri Lanka is a stunning island with beautiful sights, amazing landscapes, incredible wildlife, wonderful food and friendly people. It is not surprising that each year nearly a million people from all over the globe visit to experience the hospitality and sights on offer. Sadly, however, visitors to Sri Lanka are in real danger of inadvertently supporting alleged perpetrators of war crimes and human rights abuses, both financially and politically.”* (Sri Lanka Campaign: 2013)

The members of LTTE have designed many narratives like above to support their homeland theory by using the Tamil Diaspora. By doing so the LTTE intends to get the sympathy and support of the international community. In the long run they want to brainwash their younger generations. In his book on *Diaspora and Identities*, Zlatko Skrbis (1999) writes about the experiences of the Slovenians and Croatians after the World War II to exemplify how the tales of violence and harassment produced by the Diaspora become narratives that continue in the minds of future generations. Skrbis further states that “the reproduction of the collective pain, in consequence, was a factor which helped in the construction of the Slovenian Diaspora on the base of a common traumatic experience” (Skrbis, 1999)

The LTTE also wants a strong narrative to unite the future Diaspora generations under their flagship. These narratives could be transmitted from first generation of migrants, who really experienced the conflict, to the emerging future generations who hardly have any experience and knowledge about Sri Lanka. In this context the LTTE will ensure the continuous struggle between ethnicities and will build their international financial empire by capitalizing on the past conflict in Sri Lanka.

The other objective of the LTTE of using these narratives is to hinder the economic prosperity of rising Sri Lanka. Most of the LTTE activism is taking place in Europe, USA and Canada and Australia. The European countries that LTTE are strongly active such as UK, France and Germany, used to generate more tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka. However, the hostile activity using new media to target the Sri Lanka’s tourism industry was accelerated by the Tamil Diaspora groups after the military defeat of the LTTE which created bewilderment in the international LTTE camp and created a problems for their existence.

One of the best examples for such operations is the initiation of *Transnational Government of Tamil Ealam* (TGTE). The fear of losing LTTEs financial empire paved the way for the ‘*Rudrakumaran*’ faction to initiate the idea of a *Government in Exile* which is now termed as the TGTE. This government in exile which operates without a physical territory cannot be considered merely as a cyber tool of propaganda. One of the main tasks of the TGTE is to pronounce and portray that Sri Lanka has suppressed the rights of minorities, committed genocide and continues to violate Human Rights. This type of propaganda has created a tension in Sri Lanka’s relations, especially with western countries those who have a considerable Tamil community as their own citizens or as asylum seekers.

#### B. Strategic Communication

The LTTE is using their strategic communication network against Sri Lankan interest. Sri Lanka also has to counter these measures in order to maintain her good name in the international system. This paper argues that the tour guiding is one of the areas that is untapped but have the potential of countering strategic communication machinery of the international Tamil Diaspora. Public diplomacy is a branch of strategic communication that could be used by the tour guides. Public Diplomacy is an alternative process to traditional diplomacy that fulfills foreign policy goals and objectives of a nation. It moves forward the National Interest, and enhances National Security by informing and influencing the foreign public. The Public Diplomacy, carried out by tour guides by expanding and strengthening the relationships between the people of different states can strengthen the links between governments.

The founding definition of public diplomacy comes from Edmund Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law

and Diplomacy, when the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy was established in 1965. The Fletcher catalogue described public diplomacy as “the role of the press and other media in international affairs, cultivation by governments of public opinion, the non-government interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another and the impact of these transnational processes on the formulation of policy and the conduct of foreign affairs” ( Tuch:1990)

In order to be more effective in strategic communication, Sri Lankan government needs to accept the fact that the unity of diplomacy and widening the capability of tour guides to tell our actual story to the wider international audience could be utilized to build image of Sri Lanka. Therefore, in order to obtain the best support of the international community, Sri Lanka has to prepare a national narrative which can counter the LTTE Diaspora’s collective narrative.

Government’s public diplomacy efforts has to understand, inform, engage, and influence the foreign audiences by reaching out beyond government-to-government relations to establish a foundation of trust upon which specific policy and societal issues can be addressed in a context of informed understanding and mutual respect in this regard” (Tiedemann & Henrikson 2004)

## II. TOUR GUIDING

It is obvious that the present problem before the LTTE is the risk of losing their financial empire and the sympathy of the general public of the international community. The international Community comprise people who have earlier (knowingly or unknowingly) helped the LTTE to build up their international financial regimes. It is a high time for Sri Lankan government to develop a strategic communication and public diplomacy plan to counter adverse LTTE Diaspora propaganda against the country

Tour guides have the capacity to play a key role in promoting the national interest of the country. The focus of this paper is to examine the elements that may facilitate and improve guides’ performance of their role in Strategic Communication in order counter LTTE anti- Sri Lanka propaganda.

Adapting an internationally accepted definition given by the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (EFTGA,1998), a tour guide is defined in this paper as a person who guides groups or individual visitors around the buildings, sites and landscapes of a city or a region, to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner the cultural and natural heritage and environment. (Black and Wieler, 2005) There are four categories of licensed tour guides in Sri Lanka.

1. National Tourist Guide Lecturers
2. Chauffeur Tourist Guide Lecturers

3. Area Guides

4. Site Guides

Out of these categories there are two kinds of tour guides who can legally perform round tours in Sri Lanka. The National Tour Guide Lecturers are conducting tours for groups above 07 people. The chauffeur Tourist Guide lecturers are conducting tours for groups up to seven tourists. Sri Lanka Institute of National Tour Guide Lecturers (SLINGL) has over 1,200 licensed tour guides who are trained and fluent in English as well as in many other foreign languages. Licensed tour guides have completed their GCE Advance Level Examinations and have obtained the tour guide license (Ramaiah, 2013) There are over 1300 chauffeur tourist guide lecturers in the in the tourism industry at present. All these licensed categories could be considered as skilled labor since they have undergone substantial training in order to obtain their license.

The role of the area guides is limited to guiding in the respective province. There are site guides who are supposed to assist tourists only in respective tourist sites. All these guides are given proper training on cultural, social, economic, political aspects of conducting a tour and have the potential of converting effective tour guiding to a merit service.

There is an issue of unlicensed and unauthorized guides including the so-called ‘beach boys’ for a long period. The statistical records indicate that there are approximately 400-500 persons who come under this category. But there are more and are on the increase. (Livera: 2013) Actions of these categories may convert tour guiding into a demerit service. Therefore in this paper the author is only considering the effectiveness of the licensed category when referring to tour guides.

### A. Tour Guiding and Strategic Communication

Tour-guiding has a great potential of carrying out a role of strategic communication and public diplomacy. Guides who spend most of the time with their clients throughout the tours have a greater potential to become best ambassadors of representing the interest of the country. Former Chairman of Sri Lanka Tourist Board Renton de Alwis expressing his views about tour guides elaborates as follows.

*“The unique role played by a good tour guide in creating a visitor experience at a destination is impressive. That can be in a geographical area, a heritage site, a museum, a road side boutique, a wildlife safari park, or an exotic village fair and it can be anywhere in the world. I recollect how several years ago, a specialist tour guide on a visit to the Louvre Museum, took me on and gave me his own version of exploring this marvel. The usual museum tour lasts just one and half hours and he took six hours. The passion he had for what he knew so well (held a PhD in*

Art and Archeology) and took so much pride in sharing it all with me, held me spell-bound. Believe it or not, he only charged me the usual fee that one would pay for the shorter tour. He even told me that I should come again the next day, for there was so much more he could share with me. To this day, he has a special place in my heart and mind and each time, I think of my visit to the Louvre, it is

he, who comes top on my recall of that experience” (De Alwis 2010)

The job of a tour guide is based on his capability to influence the people by providing them the best and the accurate information regarding the place of interest of the tourists.

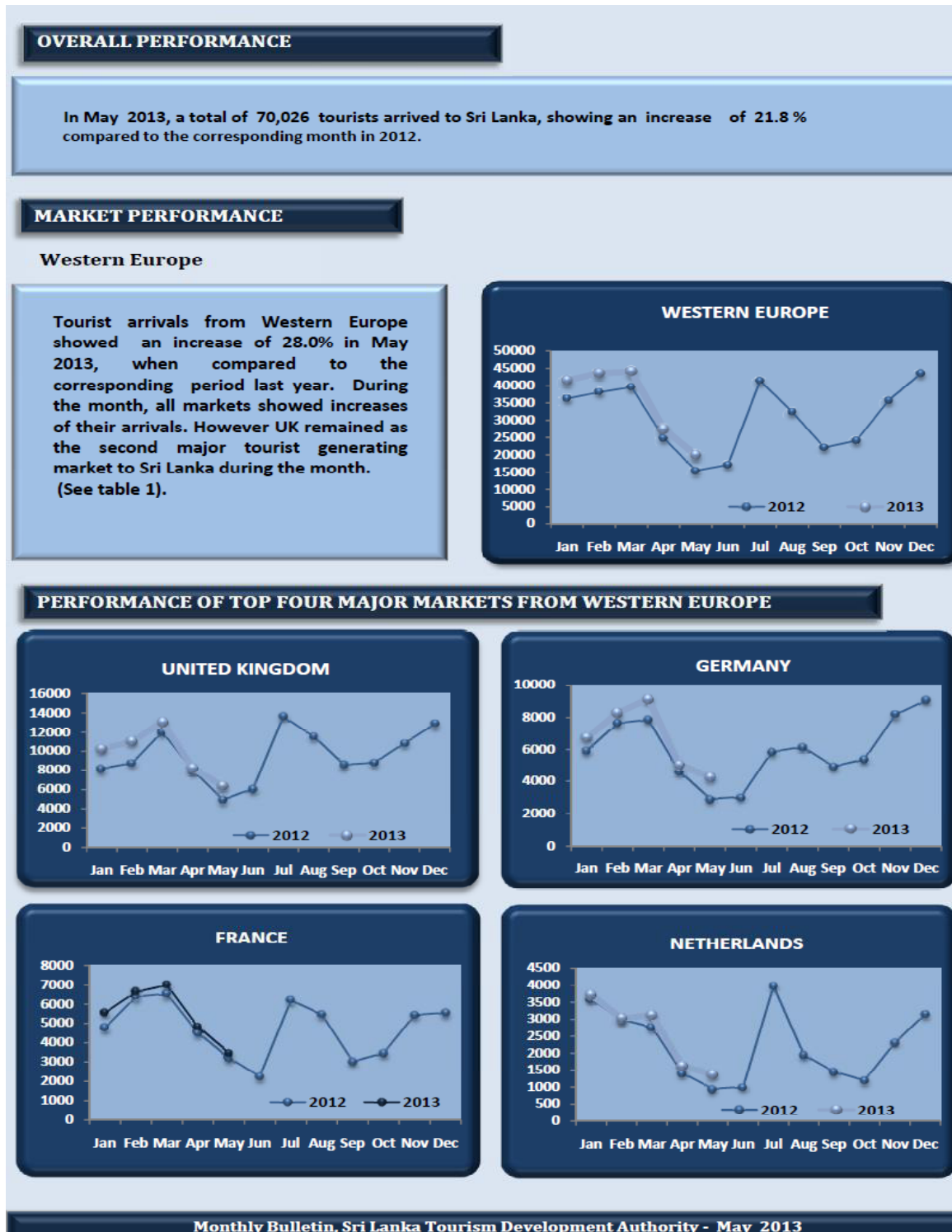


Fig 1. Courtesy of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

- The tour guide has to conduct a pre-holiday research.
- He should have knowledge about the historical places and he should possess information regarding the facts of the historical events and dates.
- He has to lead all kinds of tours as per the interest of the visitor.

Apart from the above mentioned traditional role, a tour guide should be able to identify the threat factors deriving from the international environment towards Sri Lanka. He or she should be able strategically handle his or her audiences to impart the national narrative of the country which ultimately promotes the national interest. National interest as we know amounts to national survival which will inculcate national security. Therefore a tour guide has a potential in the field of providing national security.

The national narrative could be imparted to international audiences as the true story of our country. Storytelling is an effective practice of strategic communication. This story helps us to create goodwill among our fellow nations in the international community. These activities could be carried out by coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products that are coordinated to promote national power.

### III. COUNTERING THE LTTE PROPAGANDA

The countering LTTE propaganda strategy by using the tour guides possibly can be two fold.

- Direct Countering measures
- Indirect Countering measures

#### A. Direct Countering Measures

Direct countering measures involve the direct action taken against the psychological operations (PSYOP) carried out by the LTTE Diaspora against Sri Lanka. Psychological operations have long been used by militaries around the world to coerce populations into acting in a manner favorable to their mission objective. However, in the modern context of public intelligence the participation of military is not a must to carryout a PSYOP. Well trained tour guides have the potential of carrying out a successful PSYOP.

The area of strategic communications includes activities of public diplomacy, public affairs, information operations and psychological operations. These activities are designed to contribute “positively and directly in achieving the successful promotion of the national narrative of the country. These will influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of target audiences. The message conveyed through a PSYOP can often intended to trigger a profound psychological response from the target audiences. The captive target audience (tourists) who come to Sri Lanka are either not subjected to LTTE false propaganda or they have heard the LTTE story and want to find out the real

ground situation. Therefore the tour guides have a good chance to expose the truth about Sri Lanka to tourists.

*1) Making of a National Narrative:* In order to carry out a successful PSYOP the government should give a honest national narrative to the tour guides in order to utilize during the tours. Sri Lanka has to prepare a national narrative which can counter the LTTE Diaspora’s collective cultural narrative in order to obtain the attention of the international community.

The LTTE was carrying out a similar operation using narratives against Sri Lanka for a long time. The only difference was that they are using untruth as their base. The pro-LTTE web campaign *Sri Lanka think again* tells its viewers directly as follows.

“Please tell your friends and anyone else who is thinking of visiting this beautiful island about the human rights abuses faced by the people of Sri Lanka. If you use social media you can spread the word via Face book and Twitter. You can take action and support our media freedom campaign by writing to your MP or representative today. If you are able to make a donation or join us then we can do more together to bring a lasting peace to Sri Lanka.”

Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora frames concepts like ‘*violation of human rights*’ to spread their narrative in order to prevent tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka. The LTTE never had this kind of sympathetic opinion towards western tourists when the war was going on. The world knows that the real danger to visit Sri Lanka prevailed then and not now. Ironically, did the LTTE want the western tourists to come and visit Sri Lanka when they were continuously attacking innocent civilians and economic targets? It is obvious that LTTE lead Tamil Diaspora do these things since they are envious of Sri Lanka’s development.

On the other hand, being the so called sole representative of Tamils, have the LTTE ever spent any money to develop livelihood of their own people after the conflict? Instead, they spend huge amounts of money to buy international media to tarnish the image of Sri Lanka. Are they really concerned about this poorer community, who sacrificed for the cause of Tamil homeland and did not have strength to flee out of the country when other able fellow citizens did so?

The Diaspora community who wants to support the LTTE only wants to capitalize the Sri Lankan issue in order to stabilize within the west and to build their financial regimes. If they really want to help the Tamil community who live in Sri Lanka there are ample opportunities provided by the government for them to involve in building poorer Tamil peoples’ lives in the conflict effected areas. This fact is a proof that can be used by the tour guides to enlighten tourist about the double standards of the LTTE.

Unfortunately there is no developed public diplomacy arm working to promote Sri Lankan national interest among tourists. As a first step Sri Lankan tourism authorities must create an honest national narrative based on ground realities in Sri Lanka. This process should be carried out by a combination of experts in many fields (Including defense) and their foundation of the narrative should be nothing but the truth. Following are some areas to consider when designing the national narrative.

Sri Lanka is a peaceful country and our national interest is to promote peace among all ethnicities. It will be achieved only by being one nation. Dividing the community in order to bring peace is not Sri Lanka's interest.

Post-conflict Sri Lanka is a fast developing nation. Sri Lanka's post war resettlement programme is a great success that world can learn many lessons.

Benefits of the Peace and Development in the post conflict period are enjoyed by the war affected communities.

The LTTE is in fear that their financial empire in the West will fall due to the collapse of homeland idea in Sri Lanka.

The foreign audiences are vulnerable to LTTE false propaganda. Citizens of western countries also contribute their money towards LTTE political lobbying against Sri Lanka and LTTE collect this money in disguise of legal businesses but their purpose is terrorism.<sup>1</sup>

LTTE use their en-bloc vote to blackmail local politicians, especially in the European Union, USA and Canada to create anti-Sri Lanka policies in order to support their terrorist cause.

The foreign audiences can help the conflict affected communities in Sri Lanka only by supporting the Development, Peace and Security drive taking place at present and it could be done by spreading the word of truth about the first hand experience they gather during their tours in Sri Lanka.

Tour guides could be trained by PSYOP experts In order to communicate the national narrative to tourists. The tour guides should also allow exposing the real picture of the LTTE to the tourists while performing the tour. The cultural sites and all the other places of interest could be used as tools to impart the national narrative to the foreign audiences. This could also be carried out by taking them to see the ground realities of the remaining Tamil community in North, East and Colombo. They can easily portray the world as to how the innocent Tamil civilians were used by the LTTE as a human shield at the final battle.

<sup>1</sup> Since 2009 the biggest emerging threat to Sri Lanka is the amount of money that is generated by telecom companies run by LTTE friendly Diaspora operating in Europe and Australia. They provide to politicians to carry out political campaigning work that cannot be matched by the Sri Lankan propaganda budget.

### *B. Indirect Countering Measures*

Indirect countering measures involve the performance of an unforgettable, excellent tour to the tourist that he/she will spread the positive word about Sri Lanka when he/she returns home. To ensure that kind of a performance the guides need to have the following;

The development and implementation of minimum guiding standards, social recognition of the profession and proper financial benefits to tour guides.

Rewarding guiding excellence,

Raising awareness-levels about guiding roles and standards among guides,

Increasing the credibility of guiding generally among industry stakeholders.

Prevention of unskilled persons handling tourists.

Prohibition of foreign tour leaders to conduct tours without a Sri Lankan tour guide.

(vii) Value addition to the tour packages generating from western European countries that LTTE is involved in carrying out anti Sri Lanka propaganda.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry in Sri Lanka is legislated through the Tourism Act. The Ministry of Economic Development is entrusted with the tourism development initiatives and providing solutions for existing issues in the industry. The direct and indirect measures discussed in this paper will be very effective; if the industry of tour guiding is given due assistance by the relevant authorities and addresses the grievances raised by respective tour guides and their representative associations.

The profession of tour guiding must be recognized with its potential of diplomacy. They should also be trained with strategic communication skills in order to gradually impart the honest narrative that promoted the national interest. Tour guides should be given a more autonomy in order to be creative in imparting the 'Total Sri Lankan Experience' to tourists. They should be facilitated by the authorities to reach the war affected areas and to expose visitors to the pulse of the grass-roots.

In addition to the aforesaid changes, proper maintenance of cultural sites and development of infrastructure to access these respective sites will also make an impact over the tourist's impression of the country.

There should be an effort to unite all possible actors to fight against the anti Sri Lanka propaganda carryout by the LTTE sympathetic Diaspora particularly in the Western Europe. A workable strategic plan should be drawn to counter

these false allegations and the tour guides must play an essential part of the strategy to win the hearts and minds of the tourists who visits Sri Lanka, 'the land like no other'.

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