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Sri Lanka hosts major international conference on building resilience to disasters

The Heritage Kandalama near Dambulla will be the setting for a major international conference on July 19-21 on the development of societal resilience to natural and human induced disasters, the organisers said this week.

The International Conference on Building Resilience will see the participation of over 65 international and 45 Sri Lankan academics, practitioners, professionals and policy makers concerned with interdisciplinary approaches to disaster risk reduction, and the development of sustainable communities and cities. The conference will also have a particular focus on the challenges associated with reconstruction of communities in a post-conflict environment.

The conference programme will feature five keynote addresses by leading industrialists and academics: Dakshitha Thalagodapitiya, CEO/Secretary General Chamber of Construction Industry (CCI) Sri Lanka; Dr. Ananda Mallawatantri, Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Management, UNDP Sri Lanka; Professor Peter Barrett, Professor of Management in Property and Construction at University of Salford, UK; Professor John Fein, Professor of Sustainability in the Innovation Leadership programme of RMIT University, Australia; and Professor Terrence Fernando, Director of the Future Workspaces Research Centre, University of Salford, UK. These keynote addresses are expected to provide a local and global perspective and vision for disaster resilience research and practice, CCI, one of the organisers, said.

The conference will also include the publication and presentation of 109 research articles and practice notes that have been subjected to double blind peer review by a distinguished international scientific committee. All accepted papers are to be published in the conference proceedings. Selected papers will also be published in a special issue of the International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment, by Emerald Publishing, it said.

The conference is being organised by the Centre for Disaster Resilience, School of the Built Environment, University of Salford UK and RMIT University, Australia, in association with UNDP Sri Lanka and the Disaster Management Center, Ministry of Disaster Management, the Central Environmental Authority, and the Ministry of Environment. The local organisers and hosts are CCI, University of Moratuwa, University of Peradeniya, and University of Colombo. The CCI says it has played a major role in the organisation of this event, by bringing in the construction industry experiences to the conference and publicising the event among its members.

The event is chaired by Prof. Dilanthi Amaratunga and Dr. Richard Haigh, from the Centre for Disaster Resilience, University of Salford, UK. Prof. Amaratunga is a graduate of the Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa, and later obtained her doctorate at the University of Salford. Prof. Amaratunga and Dr. Haigh are Editors of the International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment and are currently leading a study into the impact of infrastructure reconstruction programmes on social cohesion among conflict affected communities. The study is funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and includes partners at the University of Colombo, University of Jaffna, and Eastern University.

The conference will also serve as the annual meeting of the International Institute for Infrastructure Renewal and Reconstruction (IIIRR), which is a multi-university international consortium that provides overall leadership in research, education, planning, design and implementation for mitigation of the impact of natural disasters and infrastructure renewal and reconstruction projects in tsunami affected or underdeveloped regions.

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