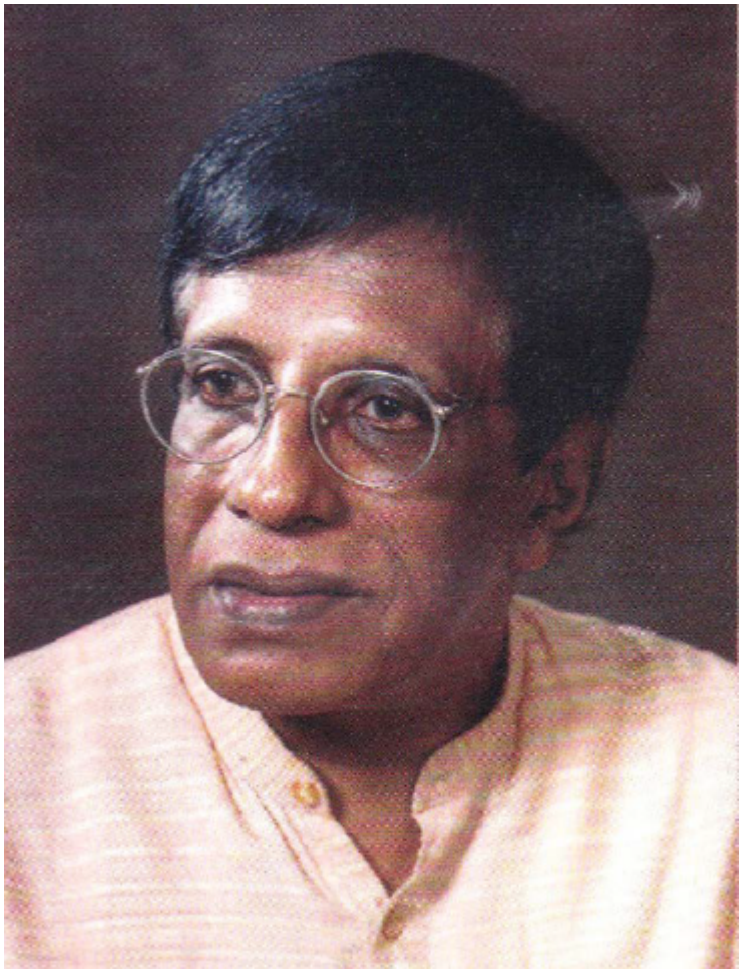


Sunimal Fernando: Advisor to the President



Sunimal Fernando has been appointed Advisor to the President Mahinda Rajapaksha. In this capacity, he will focus on social infrastructure.

Fernando has functioned as the Advisor to President Rajapaksha when he was the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and Minister of Fisheries & Aquatic Resources Development. Since the 1960s, there has been a close association between Fernando and the Rajapaksha family. He was initially allied with the President’s father, the late DA Rajapaksha and then with the late George Rajapaksha.

The scholarly Fernando was educated in Royal College, Colombo followed by the University of Cambridge, England where he read social anthropology. At Cambridge, he was a student activist, and led both the Afro-Asian Students Union and the South Asian Students Majlis concurrently. Sunimal Fernando is a former Head of the Department of Sociology at the Peradeniya University in Sri Lanka. He spearheaded

the teaching of Sociology in Sinhala thus crafting a new generation of Sinhala speaking sociologists during a period when the discipline was largely the preserve of the English speaking elite in the country. However, he was subjected to political victimization. After the elections in 1977, he was transferred without reason to the University of Jaffna and abruptly replaced as Head of Department in Peradeniya. An analyst of economic, social, political, and cultural dynamics of grass-root communities in Sri Lanka, Fernando has traveled to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and southern Europe, researching the problems and realities of grass-root level aspirations and development.

He has written and published extensively on the socioeconomic and socio-cultural aspects of development. Moreover, he has a passion for Indian philosophy and religious culture. Consistently nationalist and left of center, Fernando joined the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1953. At various intervals during the 1960s and 1970s he served as the President of the SLFP Central Organization of the former Puttalam and Nikaweratiya electorates and was a member of the party's Executive Committee. In 1957, whilst a university student, Fernando formed the first SLFP branch in England. The late Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike selected Fernando as her first Coordinating Secretary in 1970. Fernando is a great grandson of the well-known philanthropist Charles Henry de Soysa and the grandson of Dr Solomon Fernando, a national hero who died struggling against British domination in 1915. His father, Dr C W S Fernando was a respected socialist. @