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NEWS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE USE

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Chair of leading disability NGO in funding plea as she receives prestigious women's day award

Kumarini Wickramasuriya, founder of disability organisation Navajeevana, last night made an urgent plea for support on behalf of vulnerable and disabled women as she received the 2009 Zonta Women of Achievement Award.

"It is a tremendous honour to accept this prestigious award", said Kumarini who received the accolade at a ceremony at the Cinnamon Grand in Colombo to mark International Women's Day. "I feel immense pride and happiness today in what Navajeevana and everyone involved in it have achieved over the last twenty years.

"But my pride is tinged with sadness", Kumarini continued. "For we are facing in 2009 a desperate financial situation. With the huge rise in the cost of living, government priorities elsewhere and a global economic turndown, we are in danger of turning our backs on the most vulnerable in our society. Navajeevana is struggling to keep the money flowing in for our projects that help empower poor and disabled women, and I appeal to Zonta clubs international for their support in honour of my accolade today".

Kumarini, who founded Navajeevana to deal with the lack of support to people with disabilities in rural Sri Lanka, contrasted her achievement with the low opportunities that exist for women with disabilities.

"This award recognises that women in Sri Lanka have a vital role to play in providing solutions to some of the biggest problems of our society. But for every award given in recognition of woman's empowerment, there are countless other women facing poverty, injustice and hardship. Many of these are touched by disability – caring for a disabled child, becoming the breadwinner after a husband's accident, or being disabled themselves. And the thought that Navajeevana may not be able to provide them with the services they need because we too are struggling, fills me with sorrow."

Kumarini also said that the award was more than a recognition of her as an individual. "This award goes further simply than being a recognition of my work for the disabled over the last twenty years. It is the achievement of a vast network of people, including those with

disabilities, their families and friends in the community, our staff team and volunteers, partners, funders and friends. Without you all I would be a woman alone with a dream. I am indebted to all of you for helping me turn my dream into reality, and I sincerely hope we can continue our vital work for at least another twenty two years”.

-ENDS-

About Navajeevana

Navajeevana, meaning “new life”, has been working to rehabilitate people with disabilities in southern Sri Lanka for over twenty years. Based in Tangalla, the organisation’s vision is to see people with disabilities as equal and participating members of a non-discriminatory society.

Navajeevana provides a holistic service for people with disabilities and work with the “whole” person—from early identification, intervention, and treatment to full rehabilitation, where the person is able to earn an independent income. It is this holistic approach which makes Navajeevana unique in Sri Lanka.