



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

December 2008

The Context in Sri Lanka

No pause in the military operations in the North was realized in December and no Christmas Ceasefire was declared, despite appeals by Catholic and Anglican Bishops and others. Government forces made significant gains this month in Kilinochchi, the administrative headquarters of the LTTE since 1998; the last major LTTE naval point in the west in Pooneryn held since 1993; Mankulam, with an air training base nearby; Paranthan; and Mullaithivu in the northeast, occupied by the LTTE since 1996.

While there were unknown numbers of casualties on both sides, civilians also continued to suffer on a variety of fronts, including war widows from all three ethnic communities who fear for the future and their ability to rebuild their lives and secure a livelihood to support their families. There were continual reports of repeated displacements and movements of civilians in the North, attempting to get out of harm's way with limited ability to move in any direction and shortages of all kinds impacting their health and welfare. Some managed to get into government-controlled areas, including about 156 families to the Jaffna peninsula. Others moved further toward Mullaithivu as the area of the fighting has become progressively more concentrated into the northeast corner of the country.

The Environment for the NP Teams

For the Jaffna Team, the repercussions from the November cyclone and floods continued to affect the communities on the peninsula and impacted the ability of humanitarian organizations to carry out all of their activities. Many fishermen lost their boats and equipment, and numerous families were displaced. Such displacements further burden already stressed families, as livelihoods and schooling for the children are again disrupted. Another humanitarian worker was killed in Jaffna town, a national staff of ICRC who was gunned down on his way to work. Human rights mechanisms did not appear to be utilized, although six men surrendered themselves to the Courts for protection. The NP team was unable to visit families in one of the Women and Children's Centers, as it is in High

Security Zone and permission to enter was not granted. Sinhalese doctors working in the Jaffna Hospital were promised more security.

In the East, continuing rivalry within the TMVP between party leaders Karuna and Pillayan and their loyalists contributed to instability, with renewed calls to the government to disarm the party. In Trincomalee an ICRC staff member was reported abducted. The office of an INGO was broken into and four computers were stolen. Reports of both over- and under-aged conscription are still being reported in Batticaloa District. There was unrest at Eastern University following the killing of a Sinhalese student in November, with a student fast called in mid-December in protest of a Tamil student being held in relation to the killing. And in Colombo a suicide bomber killed 8 people, including security forces manning a security checkpoint and at least one civilian.

The Work of the NP Teams

The work of the teams in four districts continued apace this month, despite somewhat reduced capacity during the month due to a number of scheduled staff leaves. Some of the activity highlights for the month of December include:

- * In Jaffna: 16 field visits included area monitoring activities, stakeholder communication, and coordination meetings, including work with a human rights partner organization to prepare two young volunteers to participate in their second human rights internship in Colombo in January under NP's sponsorship. The team also prepared a presentation on the work of NP to present to the Government Agent and representatives of the Security Forces, along with other NGOs and agencies. NPSL Senior Programme Manager visited the team the first half of the month and the team worked together on programmatic analysis and project design for 2009.
- * In Trincomalee: The team continued working closely with district Peace Committees to support them taking on more human rights and cross-ethnic collaborative activities. More than 20 Peace Committees from 6 divisions participated in a two-day workshop, along with representatives from 14 other governmental and non-governmental organizations. Community-identified projects were selected as a follow-on to the workshop, and will be implemented thanks to the support of NP-Japan and the Niwano Foundation. Other cross-community activities brought together about 50 people to learn more about Human Rights, and more than 20 religious leaders came together with other community members under the joint involvement of NP and one of the team's main human rights partners. The team also conducted monitoring visits to 3 children's homes where 150 children are housed.
- * In Valaichcenai: The team received 9 cases of families being threatened or facing other violations of their rights this month, continued its facilitation of a strong network of Tamil and Muslim community-based organizations, and

made 6 visits to camps or resettlement areas of IDPs (internally displaced persons). Strong relationships are being developed in some of these areas and key civilians there do not wait for NP to come on periodic visits but make contact directly whenever the community has significant concerns. The team is engaging many stakeholders on Confidence Building and Stabilization Measures, including the Security Forces, representatives of which the team met 6 times this month. The team is also engaged in mapping 3 remote areas serving about 180 families as to their institutional infrastructure and protection needs, to be followed up in the coming months. The team is being recognized in district forums for their presence in these remote areas of the district. Relationships with authorities are consistently nurtured and monthly reports are shared widely with government servants and key security force contacts in the police and army.

- * In Batti Town: The Batti Team received 10 new family cases this month, including five involving children; they also followed up on 17 other cases and filed 28 field reports, including participation in 13 district coordination meetings. They provided Emergency Response in at least seven cases, including responding to requests for immediate protective presence for partner organizations that are serving vulnerable children in the district. Child protection work included additional coordination and collaboration with UNICEF, Terre des Hommes, and the government's DCPU unit (Department of Child Protection). Team members participated in a number of district level programmes sponsored by the Human Rights Commission to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as programmes organized by the Foundation for Co-Existence and the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies.
- * The Colombo Response Team (CRT) provides support for the field teams in the capital and accompanies vulnerable cases referred to them by the field sites as well as by other partners in Colombo. This month the team provided 21 accompaniments and attended a number of coordination forums in the capital, including the IDP Protection Working Group.

Based on requests NPSL is receiving, additional funding is being sought to support possible expansion of staff and activities into Vavuniya District in the North and/or Ampara District in the southern part of the Eastern Province in 2009 and beyond.

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