



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

January-February 2008

The start of 2008 in Sri Lanka was not auspicious. On New Years Day a Tamil parliamentarian was assassinated while at prayer at a prominent Hindu temple in Colombo. His bodyguard was also killed and other worshippers injured. The following day the Government of Sri Lanka gave the required 14-day notice announcing the formal abrogation of the six-year old Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) signed in 2002 with the LTTE. A week later the Minister of Nation Building was killed while traveling north of Colombo and others were injured. In the following weeks and the lead up to Sri Lanka's 60th Independence Day celebrations, reports of suicide bombings (often targeting civilians), killings, disappearances, civilian round-ups and detentions, and displacements of populations in the wake of full-scale military engagements in the North peppered the daily news. Sri Lanka seemed to be quickly sliding into full-scale civil war.

While the documented violations of the Norwegian-brokered CFA were many (with the vast majority of violations leveled against the LTTE), and its critics were increasingly vocal, it was also widely acknowledged that the on-going involvement of the international community and the presence of the international monitors operating as the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) made a significant contribution during this time period to the confidence and security of civilians, to the recording and reporting of human rights violations on all sides, and to the perception that a negotiated political settlement was still a shared stated goal. In mid-January that goal was officially replaced by all-out military engagement, which quickly escalated to a level not seen during the ceasefire period. Over the next weeks a series of devastating counter-attacks and suicide missions attributed to the LTTE erupted in many parts of the country, killing and wounding many civilians, including children.

Numerous civil society groups within Sri Lanka, as well as many international actors and foreign governments, expressed regret and concern over the abrogation of the CFA and the anticipated rise in human rights abuses and both military and civilian casualties. In the period following the government's announcement, the advisor to the President on the Peace Process, Jayantha Dhanapala, resigned his

position. The Commander of the Sri Lankan Army, Sarath Fonseka, spoke for many when he expressed his belief that the LTTE could be eradicated within the year and that a final political resolution would be more attainable following their defeat.

While the security situation has progressively deteriorated as far back as the end of 2005, the formal abrogation of the CFA and withdrawal of the SLMM monitors is seen by many to further diminish the human security on the ground for civilians and increase the vulnerability and danger for all segments of society. According to SLMM figures there were fewer than 130 deaths attributed to the conflict in the first 3 years of the ceasefire, compared to at least 5,000 since the end of 2005. Since the beginning of this year, full-scale military battles and aerial bombings in the north have intensified, combined with an increase in targeted attacks and indiscriminate suicide bombings throughout the rest of the country. These have left scores of civilians dead and hundreds wounded.

Emergency Regulations that came into effect in December 2006 continue to be renewed monthly and give the security forces widespread powers of arrest and detention. Many civil society actors contend there has been under-reporting of key issues by the media, who have increasingly come under threat themselves. International media watchgroups have reported that Sri Lanka is currently ranked the third most dangerous place for journalists, behind Iraq and Somalia. The Court did not respond favorably to a fundamental rights petition seeking postponement of local elections in Batticaloa District, scheduled for March 10. Because of on-going violence and instability, local elections had not been seen to be feasible in the district for many years and were last held 14 years ago.

While many positive actions were taken during the Ceasefire period to support vulnerable communities in the north and east, especially after the December 2004 tsunami, current funding constraints and the challenging political environment are affecting humanitarian operations throughout the country. In some areas of the country there remain rising tensions and fear, and mistrust between different ethnic communities. The protection of vulnerable individuals and communities under threat is more important now than ever before, with the humanitarian consequences of the war being experienced most intensely in the north and east.

Despite an increased war situation, Nonviolent Peaceforce teams continue to provide international presence, monitoring, and accompaniment to individuals and communities in the four districts where we live and work, especially for civilians who have suffered the most direct effects of the conflict over a long period of time. In the absence of a Cease Fire Agreement, numerous of our local and national partners have commented that NP's presence is more valued, more

important, and more appreciated than ever. As one wrote to us: “NP’s presence has an extreme value in the current context which cannot be overestimated.”

Nowhere was this more immediately apparent than after the announcement was made at the end of 2007 that NP would have to close one or more of its field site offices due to international funding constraints. NP partners throughout Sri Lanka rallied and helped NPSL identify sources of potential funding that are already proving beneficial. As a result, NP’s ability to maintain our northern office in Jaffna has been gratefully extended for at least several months into the future.

The Work of the Teams

Programme Coordinators from all field sites came together in Colombo in January to reflect on our work in 2007 and clarify programme objectives for 2008. Project Aims and Objectives were reviewed and the following articulation of our working framework was outlined:

The Aim of NPSL in 2008 is to support local and national partners working to increase the safety of civilians and protect the human rights of all vulnerable groups; and to help them open up space for dialogue and community participation so all conflicts might be resolved through nonviolent means.

Key Objectives:

1. Build the confidence of local organizations and individuals to address issues of human rights, peace and justice with authorities at all levels.
2. Provide space and opportunity for formal and informal networks to form and to function effectively at the community level to prevent, resolve, or limit the effects of violence.
3. Facilitate coordinated action on human security at community, district, national, and international levels.

Programmatic Strands (integrated throughout NPSL’s work):

- Early and/or Emergency Response
- Confidence-building and Nonviolent Engagement
- Facilitation and Network Support
- Advocacy and Awareness

With this guiding framework, a second meeting was held in February to discuss team workplans for 2008 and key activities that promise to help us reach our Objectives. It is clear that funding agencies will require more results-based monitoring of activities and more project accountability, including both quantitative and qualitative data to document our impact.

The Work of the Colombo Response Team (CRT)

One focus of the CRT's work in this period has been supporting the accompaniment needs in Colombo of cases referred to them by the field sites, as well as additional referrals from local partners and a growing network of civil society actors. Intensive work is required at times on high risk cases. In one case, after many attempts by CRT trying to find a safe location for a mother and two young children, the women's organization that had finally pledged to help withdrew at the last moment due to their own security concerns, and it was back to the beginning for a very traumatized family. All too often it is single women who have lost their husbands, with children who have lost their father, who find little support and no good options. Such setbacks are to be expected from time to time when working with the many challenges confronting vulnerable families.

Another focus of the Team is to help develop a more coordinated response from Colombo actors and civil society to address threats to human rights and the security concerns of such vulnerable people. CRT also plays an advocacy role with its involvement in and relationship-building with a variety of Colombo-level contacts, agencies, local and national organizations headquartered in Colombo, and other stakeholders. CRT attended a media brief organized by civil society organizations and various meetings of international humanitarian agencies. The team also is part of the UNHCR Protection Working Group, an initiative that parallels similar working groups at the district levels. Currently the Working Group is working on an Advocacy Strategy for 2008, which promises to increase the efficacy of combined advocacy efforts.

The Work of the Team in Jaffna District

The Jaffna Team continues to focus its protection efforts on the following groups: individuals and families under threat or fear, surrenderees, children and women, human rights defenders and community animators, INGO's staffed without expats (i.e., only national staff), University students, and a number of vulnerable communities.

In the area of child protection, NP and UNICEF are collaborating on drafting safety tips for children while traveling to school and at home, which will be used as part of an awareness campaign in local schools and child friendly spaces. Joint monitoring and visits of women and children 'surrenderees' both in the prison and the rehabilitation center have built stronger coordination between the two agencies. Additionally, it has allowed persons under threat to review ALL of their safety options with both agencies. NP has been able to build more trust with the authorities at both the prison and a new rehabilitation center. NP has also accompanied UNICEF national staff into the field when no UNICEF international protection officer was available. And NP co-sponsored a two-day district level

meeting regarding child protection mechanisms, referrals and gaps. Participants included NGO, INGO, CBO and GoSL representatives.

Individual cases received by the team were all related to fear and threats. The team refers many to HRC, ICRC, and/or accompanies people to surrender, upon request. In one case, the Team's quick response to the abduction of one man and immediate assistance to the wife and children were instrumental in getting the man released the same day.

NP Jaffna is working with our Colombo staff to design a Partners' Meeting and workshop regarding rights and advocacy, enabling national partners to speak with various national and international agencies in Colombo, and UNDP offered to conduct a workshop regarding human rights principles and documentation standards. Supporting the creation of a network between relevant actors in both the North and South of Sri Lanka provides a healthy exchange of information and potential alliances, which can hopefully continue long after NP leaves.

The Work of the Team in Trincomalee District

The Trinco team's priority remains providing presence and accompaniment, as needed, to threatened individuals and families, and to the many vulnerable communities, local organizations and peace committees established (but not always fully functional) in all three ethnic communities (Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim).

Many groups, including the local Human Rights Commission (HRC), depend on the Team's presence and accompaniment for their field investigations from time to time, including in contested border areas where land disputes can quickly turn violent. Though based in Trinco Town, the team continues to visit the Mutur office site two to three days a week, maintains relationships with key stakeholders and NP partners there, and provides regular presence in the southern part of the district.

Relationships with police are generally strong as NP maintains engagement with the many Peace Committees historically established in the District under Police auspices. Without NP's encouragement, nurturing and networking, many of the Peace Committees would remain dormant or relatively inactive. The Peace Committee work has been supported this year by a capacity-building grant from NP-Japan, and the team hosted a two-member delegation from Japan for a visit to seven Peace Committees in February. The HRC will also support the capacity building of these committees by offering human rights training to them. In other child rights and protection work, the team has built relationships with the Women and Children's Desk officers of several police stations and accompanies families and individuals, as needed, to approach the police to report violations.

Working with UNICEF and other agencies, NP has been designated for the division of Kantale for specific child rights monitoring in the coming months.

In this and other areas in the south of the District, the team regularly visits a number of refugee camps of war-displaced IDP's (internally displaced persons), and collaborates with UNHCR, NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council) and other agencies to ensure basic needs are communicated to relevant providers, and human security and protection is addressed. And, as if the challenges of displacement and poverty were not enough, in some areas it's wild elephants that prevent families from staying safely in their newly resettled areas overnight, forcing them to return nightly to more protected camps, disrupting their lives and livelihoods, and further destabilizing already fractured communities.

The Work of the Teams in Batticaloa District (Batti Town and Valaichchenai Field Sites)

Our two teams in Batti Town and in Valaichchenai have also faced a challenging period with pre-election monitoring the major activity for four district staff in the lead up to local elections to be held on March 10. They were also joined by two staff in February on loan from other field sites. The monitoring teams cover all areas involved in the election of local officials that will serve at the Municipal Council and Pradeshiya Sabha levels, and have met with all stakeholders of contesting political parties, security forces and police, elections commissioners and other government officials, and concerned civil society. Election monitoring has provided opportunities for NP to be introduced, or re-introduced, to many actors and the nonpartisan and protective mandate of NPSL to be widely shared.

The work in Batti District, however, was not all about the elections and the teams managed to carry out other significant community-based protection activities during this period. Teams continued to field many individual requests from threatened individuals and families, although the number of killings and reported abductions has been less in this period. Some youth continued to escape from armed groups and families sought NP's help to assist them. Relationships were strengthened with government agencies mandated to help protect children, such as the Probation Department and the National Child Protection Commission. While NP facilitated initial meetings with government servants, the confidence of parents increased and they were able to subsequently advocate on their own behalf. Such activities help empower local communities to be more active agents for the protection of their children. NP teams also participated in the planning and groundwork for both a district level meeting to involve more local actors in such community-based child protection measures for 2008, which will be further explored at a UNICEF-sponsored national meeting to be held in March in Kandy.

Vocational training centers that have been a source of help to many vulnerable youth in the District are facing their own capacity limits. NP subsequently facilitated a meeting among representatives of three centers so they could share information and strategies. In collaboration with local civil society, NP also supports the Centers and the families in addressing re-integration issues for the youth once their training programs end. A workshop was held to assist the parents in identifying needed actions to begin laying the groundwork for a safer return home for their children or in developing plans for other longer-term solutions.

Apart from other psycho-social impacts and persistent trauma that some ex-combatants may experience, lack of education and financial resources, as well as a language barrier when youth speak only Tamil, all severely limit available options.

Both teams are also developing wider networks to build more extensive “early warning networks” when and where violence might occur. Batti Team brought together ten representatives of Rural Development Societies in their areas and developed new relationships in the Muslim area of Kattankudy. Valaichchenai Team also has gained additional partners in the Muslim community and regular support of small CBOs is helping to lay the groundwork for a strong Early Warning Network on the northern half of the District as well.

And continuing the slow but powerful work of creating community out of despair and isolation, two meetings were held in Valaichchenai with mothers known to us for more than a year a half, war-affected women who have lost children to an armed group. Facilitated by local activists, the meetings (one with almost 100 participants) were to plan a public event for early March to launch the publication of a long-awaited booklet of the women’s testimony gathered over time, in poetic form. The booklet also highlights some of the other activities they have shared: tree planting ceremonies when a family member has been killed, road painting to publicly call for Respect for all Life, a vigil for peace outside the NP office and a plea for the safe return of the children, ALL children, on International Peace Day last September. As shared in the summary report of the event at the time, the most remarkable outcome of this event was the heart-connection developed over time between parents whose children have managed to leave an armed group, and their standing in solidarity with those parents whose children have still not returned.

NPSL is making a difference in Sri Lanka.

Written by Rita Webb



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

March 2008

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) continues its military engagement with the LTTE in the northern part of the country, with reportedly rising casualty figures and civilian displacements. The spate of suicide bombings the country experienced in January and February diminished this month. A number of interesting political developments occurred as well during March 2008.

On the national level, a leading civil society group issued a preliminary report, "Under Fire: Humanitarian Persons in Humanitarian Service in Sri Lanka," which details 67 cases of killings or disappearances of humanitarian workers in Sri Lanka in approximately the last two years. Their full report will be issued in the coming months in all three national languages.

By month's end the Government embarked on a campaign to seek international support to get re-elected to its seat at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which comes up for review in May. Sri Lanka is, among other countries, scheduled for its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in Geneva in May, and both the GoSL and concerned Sri Lankan human rights defenders have prepared briefs to defend their opposing perspectives on the human rights situation in the country.

Also announced this month was the departure of the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP), which had been formed at government request to oversee the Presidential Commission of Inquiry. The Commission had been established in November 2006 by order of the President to investigate 16 incidents of alleged serious violation of human rights that occurred since Aug 1, 2005. IIGEP members claim that their recommendations and observations were largely ignored or rejected throughout the time of their tenure, and that the Commission will not be in position to pursue its mandate transparently and in accordance with basic international norms and standards.

The work of the teams in March

For NPSL, March was an active month, responding to the request of our national election-monitoring partner, PAFFREL (Peoples Action for Free and Fair Elections) to assist their local monitors in their observation of the local elections held in Batticaloa District for the first time in 14 years. From the announcement of the election, reservations were widely expressed as to whether the process could be free and fair. PAFFREL and NP proceeded with the monitoring, concerned to mitigate and/or discourage violence, and to document any abuses as much as possible.

Such challenges point up the difficulty of trying to responsibly perform a nonpartisan role in a highly politicized environment. While there was a drastic reduction in the numbers of armed men seen in the District during the weeks leading up to the election, and it proved to be largely (though not completely) free of violence, there remains much controversy as to whether it was indeed free and fair, especially as some political parties did not feel they could safely field candidates for various posts and therefore sat out the election altogether.

Managing the Work of the Teams

This month a transition was made to organize the work of the NPSL teams under Heads of Field Offices (HFOs). Through this new structure NPSL intends to improve coordination, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as to progressively devolve more responsibilities and accountability to the field level.

The Work of the Colombo Response Team (CRT)

The Colombo Response Team (CRT) supports the work of our field teams in a number of ways, particularly the Jaffna Team, as many war-affected people in the north must often seek recourse, relocation, or further services in the capital. The main route out of Jaffna continues to be by air to Colombo since the A9 road has been closed for a year and a half. By participating in Colombo-level forums, the CRT can both convey timely information from the field to appropriate venues/actors and receive useful information or facilitate connections for district level activities with appropriate resource people and agencies in the capital. In March CRT met with the Catholic Apostolic Nuncio to discuss the situation of war-affected families. The team also contributed to other civil society meetings, carried out various accompaniment requests, made referrals to other support services, and continued expanding the network of Colombo resources.

In March, CRT also worked with the Jaffna Team to organize and host a Human Rights Defender workshop (see below under Jaffna Team for a fuller description

of that event), and assisted four young people to get 2-week internships in Colombo with several human rights organizations. The interns were able to understand much better avenues of advocacy and recourse, and were able to observe a hearing of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into some of the high profile human rights cases currently before them. As one of the sponsors wrote to us later: “Dear Friends, I take this opportunity to thank all of you for taking a massive task to (help) train my people. We feel proud to say that we are not alone to fight against the violence.”

The Work of the Team in Jaffna District

The Jaffna Team remains under the Operations Category of “Restricted,” and curfew passes continue to be required on a monthly basis. Two field team members will shift to Jaffna in April to strengthen our team there during this critical period. Sounds of outgoing shelling that have been constant in recent months diminished considerably in March, providing some measure of relief to those living and working there. The team continued with accompaniments, protective presence to vulnerable areas, and/or referrals and linkages. The Jaffna Team continues to be part of strong coordination between and among the agencies working in the north, meeting regularly with them to share information and strategize combined actions to better support civilians isolated on the Jaffna Peninsula. The Human Rights Commission in Jaffna has had 740 cases of missing persons reported to them since December 2005.

A coordinated effort between Jaffna Team and the Colombo Response Team resulted in a very successful opportunity for local human rights defenders in the North and East to come together to increase their capacity and network with others doing difficult human rights work in their home areas. The idea for the program came as a request from a local human rights organization. The 5-day programme focused on international standards, national laws and regulations that impact human rights, mechanisms to meet standards, and processes for documenting and monitoring human rights cases in the current context. The workshop brought together 13 people, along with two of our national field officers, and was followed by a two-week internship opportunity for four young people to work with Colombo-based groups.

The Work of the Team in Trincomalee District

The NP Team in Trinco spared one team member to assist Batticaloa District during the election period, while the rest continued their protection and international presence activities. Joint meetings with the Human Rights Commission were held on IDP issues, as well as to encourage more police investigation into abductions, killings and disappearances that sources suggest are on the rise over the past two months.

The support of local Peace Committees was taken to a new level in the district this month, supported by a grant from the Japanese-funded Niwano Foundation. Preparatory needs assessments were done with 15 activists from five areas and a follow-up workshop was held based on their identified needs. A two-day workshop was organized and attended by 24 peace committee leaders and covered an array of capacity-building needs facilitated by local activists including: mediation and conflict resolution skills; IDP rights; nonviolent communication; human rights; Sri Lankan Emergency Regulations; legal aid resources; conflict early warning indicators; and government services, including from the Probation Department and Child

Protection authorities. The workshop was also an opportunity for the NP team to build relationships and share our mandate with special invited guests, including senior religious leaders from all faiths, the Chief Secretary for the Eastern Province, and the assistant to the Government Agent (GA) on IDPs and natural disasters. Government servants at the grassroots levels and many local police authorities in divisions where we work seem to well understand and appreciate the presence of the NP Trinco Team.

The team continues to coordinate with others on child protection work and is part of a network of international, national and local bodies that is working to establish a safe place for at-risk youth within the district. The team also continues to work from their base in Trinco Town, traveling to the field office in Mutur and serving the very vulnerable areas of Seruwila and Echalaipattu, where Tamil-Sinhala land disputes are a potential flashpoint for violence.

The Work of the Teams in Batticaloa District (Batti Town and Valaichchenai Field Sites)

The two teams in Batti District are situated 32 km apart. This allows them to cover a substantial portion of the district, as well as to collaborate and support each other in a variety of activities. Both teams were heavily involved in this month's pre- and post-election monitoring in Batticaloa District, as described earlier.

Despite its challenges, the elections also provided NPSL with an opportunity to be in relationship with a number of stakeholders in the District that they had minimal or no opportunity to contact in prior months, including a variety of Security Force personnel, police, political parties, and government officials at many levels. Such relationships can now be built on in the coming months which, if they work well, can serve to improve the safety and acceptance of our staff and the NP mandate, as well as provide an opening for the civilians NP serves to also have more access to

these authorities with our facilitation and networking in order to improve their security and advocacy as well.

Work with children and families is a large part of the activity of the teams, strengthening existing safety nets and increasing self-advocacy, as well as identifying safer options for them when remaining in their home area is not the best option. Nine accompaniments were required this month. Twelve mothers from the northern part of the district were accompanied to the main town of Batti at the beginning of the month to join more than a hundred and fifty others for the launching of a book of mothers' poems and readings published in all three languages. Facilitated by local peace activists, the booklet marked a milestone in almost two years of meetings and activities. Two staff also participated in a 4-day UNICEF-sponsored workshop on Children Affected by Armed Conflict, an important national initiative that will bring additional information and coordination back to the districts to improve the available resources and services to children being directly impacted by the conflict in the North and East.

In March there were continued reports of adults affected by threats, arrests, killings, abductions, forced recruitment, disappearances, and sexual/gender-based violence. NP provides support to help people to report their cases to agencies, for example the Human Rights Commission, or to access legal advice.

The teams regularly monitor four IDP camps weekly and Batti Team participated in monitoring two instances of resettlement to the western part of the District, following "Go and See" visits to determine if the area and available resources and infrastructure were adequate for safe resettlement. While many internally displaced persons have been resettled over the past year, approximately 20,000 people are still awaiting resettlement, including families who have still not been able to return to Trinco District to the north. The teams regularly participate in forums at the district level, including the IDP protection working group, and the Emergency Child Protection group. Batti Team was invited to attend a Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) discussion in Ampara District. NPSL has gotten repeated requests to deploy a permanent team to Ampara District, but the most we can offer is periodic visits.

The team is encouraging development of a Community Information/Early Warning Network that brings 17 cross-ethnic organizations together in the northern part of the district, with their third meeting held in March. This group represents the first time that many of these Tamil and Muslim organizations have met together to discuss shared community interests. Slowly the groundwork is being laid for more trust and information sharing among the members and for future joint activities across differences and geographic areas.

Written by Rita Webb



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

April 2008

Living and Working in the Context of Sri Lanka

Almost every day of April brought one more alarming tragedy or another sad story to those with an eye or ear to the news coming from Sri Lanka this month.

Escalating battles in the North between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are said to be the worst fighting with the most numbers of casualties the country has seen in at least 18 months. The government forces, however, continue to speak confidently that the LTTE will be defeated before year's end.

Among the dead this month were two prominent figures who were assassinated in separate incidents. The first Sunday morning of the month, an explosion took place just as the popular Minister of Highways, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, was flagging the start of a marathon race in the western district of Gampaha. At least 11 other people were killed and many others injured in the suicide bomb attack. Two Sundays later, a Roman Catholic priest and Tamil human rights activist returning from church in the Wanni was killed by a roadside bomb in LTTE-controlled area. Fr. Kili, as he was known, was director of NESOHR, the Northeast Secretariat on Human Rights, headquartered in Kilinochchi. Both deaths were widely mourned on different sides of the country.

Indiscriminate violence was also visited on civilians near Colombo as they were making their way home on the last Friday of the month when a bus bomb was detonated during rush hour, killing more than 20 on the spot and injuring scores more. It was the worst civilian attack since the terrible 16 January bus bomb in the southeast in Buttala, where civilians who escaped the initial blast were then killed by gunfire as they were trying to escape the burning wreckage.

The lead-up to the first-ever Eastern Provincial Council Elections, as a separate political unit, dominated the latter part of April, as parties geared up for May 10th elections. NPSL has again assisted PAFFREL by providing international presence in the accompaniment of its local election monitors to observe the pre-election

process. With Colonel Karuna still in detention in the UK on false travel documents and his ultimate legal fate still unknown, his chief lieutenant and the party's candidate for Chief Minister of the Eastern Province, Pilliyan, is now keen to present the TMVP strictly as a political party subscribing to democratic principles and the rule of law. To bolster their claim of democratic and political transformation the group publicly released a total of 39 under-aged children in April. (See below for more information on child soldiers).

The Work of the Teams

At the end of April, NPSL had a total of 55 international and national peace workers and support staff in five field sites in four Districts providing international presence, accompaniment, monitoring, emergency response, confidence-building, nonviolent engagement, facilitation and network support, and advocacy. None of this work would be possible without the national staff and the world-wide network of administrative and fund-raising support provided by hundreds of NP staff, volunteers, governing council members, member organizations, and individual, organizational, and agency donors.

The Colombo Response Team (CRT)

Our small CRT was made smaller this month due to Provincial Council election observation needs in the East, with one of the two international field staff redeployed for monitoring work in Batticaloa and Ampara Districts the second half of the month. The CRT coordinator and field officer did six accompaniments both within Colombo and in support of vulnerable people from the east. Advocacy efforts continued at the national level, both for individuals suffering from human rights violations and security fears, and with national level bodies.

As follow-up to the successful capacity-building workshop for human rights defenders in March, reports from the four young defenders from Jaffna who completed two-week internships in Colombo were submitted to the partnering agencies. One of the agencies has requested that the program be continued and that an additional intern be identified for June. CRT is continuing to plan for identifying and facilitating Colombo training resources to meet requests coming from the Valaichchenai team in support of local partners there. Efforts to improve IDP advocacy at the national level are also under review.

The Jaffna District Team

Travel to and from the Jaffna peninsula continues to be an involved and unpredictable process, with flights being delayed or cancelled at a moment's notice. Only in the third week of the month was a third FTM finally able to be deployed to Jaffna, having been shifted from Batti Team at the beginning of the month in order to reinforce the team in Jaffna.

The security situation in the north disrupted some of the team's movements in April, and shelling limited access to some areas and interrupted scheduled visits. There was an increase in activity near the Forward Defense Line (FDL), which peaked on 23 April. The team continues to do a thorough security assessment when going to various sites, as there is a risk that they could be caught within shelling range if military maneuvers suddenly shift. Contact is made with the UN radio facilities prior to going to the field. The team secures a monthly curfew pass and the national staff has government security clearance to carry on their activities.

The team was able to visit some of the very vulnerable communities in the district, including Allaipiddy, where there was a resettlement exercise on 21 April. On the visit to Allaipiddy, where NP has a history of support, the team was told that their presence provides a feeling of security and 'sense of normalcy' in an otherwise tense and insecure situation. Advocacy and linkages were requested on pressing needs of housing and sanitation.

More visits to provide international presence were made to the Jaffna prison and to rehabilitation centers in Allaipiddy, Chavakacheri, and in Jaffna town. Such visits provide an opportunity for people who have 'surrendered' to the government because of threats to their security an opportunity to share on-going concerns and needs, and allows for the monitoring of the conditions under which they are living. NP works in close collaboration with UNICEF and UNHCR in monitoring activities. The team was not able to meet this month with the head of the Navy but was able to meet his second in command. Such regular contact with military stakeholders is important for the team's acceptance in the area and for their security.

The Trincomalee District Team

The Trinco team consisted of only four internationals for most of the month, with our newest FTM joining the team towards the end of the month to assist with the election monitoring activities. Due to the spotlight on the district because of the Provincial Elections, the overall atmosphere in the area gave the appearance of improvement as shops were open later, and there were more civilians visiting beaches and youth on playing fields.

Despite such appearances of normalcy, however, there are many reports of voter harassment and threats regarding voting preferences, including of local INGO staff. The focus on the elections for most government actors and others diverted attention away from ongoing activities and community issues. As happened in the Batti District local elections, the involvement in the Provincial Council election monitoring process does facilitate the ability of NP teams to meet with and engage

many stakeholders and to access areas that we are otherwise limited in reaching. The team met police and security forces at many levels, government agents at all levels, including 5 GS's and the GA, political party representatives, and others in civil society.

The Trinco team recorded eight individual protection cases this month, related to extortion, threats or abductions; four being new ones, and the rest stemming from on-going relationship with vulnerable families. Five IDP camps were visited and the situation monitored for resettlement, which was observed not to be properly prepared. In one case 165 families were forced to stay in a school as no temporary shelters had been provided. A Rural Development Organization, led by a monk as its president, also discussed with NP IDP security issues in their area, including lack of shelter. Identified needs were coordinated with UNHCR and ICRC, along with other meetings with these agencies related to on-going human security issues for civilians of killings, abductions and disappearances.

Several accompaniments were handled this month. One was of a local NGO partner doing community awareness programs in a vulnerable area who sought NP support to travel with them to and from the area so they felt safe carrying out their program. Another accompaniment was of a Buddhist monk in fear of armed group activity in an area where he was meeting. Groundwork was also laid with a Hindu kovil leader regarding planning for an intended meeting with a Muslim mosque in Kinniya after the elections. A joint issue with UNHCR is land issues between Sinhalese and Muslims in the south of the district, a potential flashpoint for violence.

Positive feedback from the previous month's capacity-building workshop of Peace Committees facilitated by NP, with funds from the Niwano Foundation in Japan, continued to be received. Six of the PC's have begun focusing on creating a common platform for joint and collection action, as well as others talking about the need for a district-wide network that NP could help catalyze.

The Trinco team also attended ten Child Protection meetings of various district actors, including UNICEF, Save the Children and others. A district child protection initiative is planning a July awareness campaign on child abuse. The team also participated in a district meeting with UNICEF to assess our 2007 partnership and to look ahead to 2008. The Trinco team also reports regularly to the GA, the Inspector General of Police and various Divisional Secretaries.

The Batticaloa District Teams (Batti Town and Valaichchenai)

In Batticaloa District the teams also balanced towards the end of the month their on-going work with election monitoring support for PAFFREL, with three international staff for most of the month in Batti town and two in Valaichchenai.

As the month progressed, the situation became more tense and there were incidents of election-related violence particularly in Muslim constituencies. For the most part, party politicking took the form of door to door canvassing as opposed to the traditional large rallies. As in Trinco, many government actors and stakeholders were met with in relation to the elections and police and military presence was heightened. These meetings included the Minister of Education for the East, various police officials, the Senior Superintendent of Police for the Special Task Force, and key political parties.

Field work for the teams was sometimes affected by heavy rains but much work was accomplished. The Batti team received six new protection cases and 8 follow-up visits; with 8 accompaniments handled within the district, and one outside the district. Follow-up visits were also made to 11 families to assess their current protection concerns and to help link them to needed services and resources, including to other agencies and the Human Rights Commission for follow-up. Such referrals unfortunately do not often result in tangible results for the families, as several of the cases this month involve abductions of family members for which no news has been received, despite the involvement of other agencies, the Human Rights Commission, and government mechanisms.

Child protection work included eight at-risk youth facilitated to find a safer location; a meeting at one of the youth training facilities with a small group of parents and the administrators to air mutual concerns was facilitated by NP; district child protection meetings were attended for better information sharing and coordination; and attendance at the passing-out ceremony of 180 youth at one of the training centers NP has worked closely with. NP's support of conflict affected youth and the Center was publicly recognized for several hundred attendees and their families at the ceremony. More coordinated efforts with Save the Children's reintegration program are also happening. Other actors who also work with CAAC issues (children affected by armed conflict) were also included, such as ILO, WUSC, and Sarvodaya, to improve district coordination and identify gaps or overlap. Both teams participated in 2007 UNICEF partnership evaluation meeting and district plans for 2008.

Four IDP camps and several resettlement processes continued to be regularly monitored, and bi-weekly Protection Working Group coordination meetings are regularly attended by both teams. Nutrition has been identified as a major issue, especially among children and infants. Other issues around adequate shelters, availability of drinking water, and the danger of wild elephants in some areas are also affecting the resettlement processes. At a Ministry of Resettlement meeting, food and welfare disparity between IDP camps was also raised. In one camp visit, the team was presented with a situation of a man with serious knife wounds; the

team was able to secure emergency ambulance service through communication to the team base and subsequent contacts at the Italian Red Cross.

In work at the community level, both teams continue to meet with local organizations in listening sessions on community needs and realities, as well as in helping to build relationships of trust among local groups for better information sharing, establishment of early warning networks, and to strengthen existing community-based mechanisms and institutions, such as the Rural Development Societies and Women RDS's in the southern part of the district. In the northern part of the district the fourth monthly network meeting of 17 local Tamil and Muslim community groups also met. The goal is to try to eventually shift the focus away from NP's facilitation role and to the local groups themselves for long-term capacity building and development of sustainable community-based protection mechanisms.

Because of the rural location of the Valaichchenai office and the fact that other international organizations do not maintain offices in the northern half of the district, NP has been approached to share space in our Valaichchenai Annex with ASB and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) 2-4 days per week to reach rural civilians and the court system in offering legal services and other support on human rights cases. NRC has been focusing on the many documentation needs that civilians had in the post-tsunami environment but now wishes to shift that work to the government mechanisms and to focus more on human rights. A collaboration with NP would facilitate this work for the northern part of the district and underscores the benefits of our presence in that part of the district.

By Rita Webb, Programme Officer



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

May 2008

Violence rocked Sri Lanka from all sides in May 2008, from military engagements in the North between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the North; to election-related and communal violence in the East; to random acts of violence against civilian targets in and near the capital in the West. Combined with run-away inflation and monsoonal flooding in parts of the South, there was hardly a constituency untouched by some adversity this month.

Eastern Provincial Council Elections

The work of Nonviolent Peaceforce-Sri Lanka (NPSL) was dominated for most of the month by the lead up to and the aftermath of the Eastern Provincial Council elections, where three of NPSL's teams are situated. Declaring democracy restored to the East following the May 10th polls, the coalition led by the President's party claimed victory in the elections and a mandate for the continuing military strategy to rid the north next of "the scourge of terrorism." The Government now intends to replace emergency humanitarian and recovery work with long-term development and infrastructure projects to re-build the East, presuming that it can also win the confidence of financial institutions and donors.

Many such promises were made in the lead up to the elections, with the President reiterating that all the peoples' aspirations would finally be met in the East, including for livelihood development and food security, a growing problem given a 26.2% inflation rate, according to one economic analysis. But the government's assessment of the election and its outcomes did not go unchallenged. The Opposition party condemned the poll as irreparably flawed and several election monitoring organizations reported widespread elections violations, including the murder of two police officers who were killed in separate incidents several days after the Election.

In the aftermath of the election, the Government was faced with the equally difficult process of deciding who would now be the Eastern Provincial Council's

Chief Minister: the main TMVP contender and former LTTE child soldier, Sivenesathurai Chandrakanthan, also known as Pillayan; or Muslim minister M.L.A.M. Hisbullah. Ultimately it was announced that the post would be rotated amongst the three community leaders elected, with Pillayan starting out as the first Chief Minister of the Eastern Province. After a period of two years, he is to be succeeded by Minister Hisbullah for two years, and then a Sinhalese elected from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party within the President's party, the UPFA, will be given the Chief Minister post for the balance period of one year.

Attacks on the Media and Other Rights Violations

The importance of the media in conflict situations is well-established, but members of all media in Sri Lanka continue to be highly vulnerable. This month saw the brutal killing in the North of the ninth journalist in the last two years, and another high profile attack on a journalist in Colombo who was abducted and assaulted, the associate editor of The Nation. Senior journalist J S Tissaianayagam's arrest and detention continues into its third month without charges being made against him.

A government minister reported seventy eight people have disappeared since the beginning of this year. According to the Human Rights Commission in Trincomalee, fifteen people have disappeared in that district during the first half of May. The government has also been pressed to introduce witness protection mechanisms, considered a necessity for any credible probe of rights violations.

Further threats to Sri Lanka's standing in the world community lie ahead and could adversely affect the country's international position. Chief among these is the possible removal of Sri Lanka from the General System of Preferences (GSP+) that gives the country exemptions from significant tariffs for trade with the European Union, Sri Lanka's largest trading partner. Losing these benefits would worsen an already critical economic situation, which has brought drastic increases in fuel, electricity and food costs and is further destabilizing the political environment.

Violence Spreads Unpredictably

In addition to the full-scaled prosecution of the war in the North, the LTTE is accused of continuing to carry out suicide missions and other bombings targeting civilians in other parts of the country, including attacks on buses, trains and at ports. LTTE is said to have bombed and sank a navy cargo ship in Sri Lanka's eastern port town of Trincomalee just before the voting for the Eastern Provincial Council elections.

A bomb on a train in Dehiwela, near the NP headquarters, killed at least 10 civilians, with scores more wounded. NP national staff on their way to catch that train ran back to the office at the sound of the explosion. A flurry of phone calls ended with all staff safely accounted for. Several powerful bombs in various locations have been detected and defused prior to their detonation.

In addition to the government/LTTE clashes, in Batticaloa the last week of May and into the beginning of June, violence between Muslims and Tamils suddenly reached alarming proportions. The immediate trigger was the targeted killing of a local TMVP leader and his bodyguard, and the retaliatory killing of 3 Muslim civilians. Over several days, some Muslim shops and lorries were burned; two policemen were killed; and several men were beaten or reported abducted. Hundreds of families on the border areas of two of the three main Muslim centers in the District (Kattankudy and Eravur) displaced to churches and other centers for fear of clashes and attacks. NP visited the displacements and helped link humanitarian resources to meet immediate needs. Shops were closed and curfew was imposed in some areas.

While high level meetings and calls for calm were being held between Tamil and Muslim political leaders, the two NP teams in the District were engaged in almost non-stop activity to try to find ways to help mitigate and reduce the violence at the grassroots level. NP was the only international organization invited to a meeting at the Bishop's House that brought together area representatives of the two communities.

Subsequently the teams facilitated further meetings in two locations, bringing together other local actors, religious leaders and security force representatives from among their contacts, and using their networks to help reduce rumors. A government representative in Valaichchenai told the NP team there that their presence in the community helped to keep violence from erupting in the Tamil/Muslim areas of Valaichchenai and Oddamavadi.

The Work of the Teams

Colombo Response Team

The Colombo Response Team (CRT) worked this month on expanding its knowledge of the resources available for cases of vulnerable individuals and families seeking asylum. The asylum process is often the path of last resort, and only a small percentage of people who apply to various countries are successful in their asylum appeal. NPSL does not have the resources or capacity to respond to all asylum requests or to undertake the intense work needed to pursue that process. Further help has to come from the UN Office of Human Rights, the Center for

Victims of Crime, the Human Rights Commission, and other resources in the capital, including psychological and counseling services for traumatized victims. The team continues to help individuals and families to access such services.

Follow-up plans to the successful March training of human rights defenders in the North and East is underway, with further discussion with one of our partner organizations to extend internship opportunities in the capital for young people wishing to work in the human rights field. Follow-up plans are also underway to host a second Partners Network meeting in the coming months in order to connect NPSL partners across districts for mutual support, sharing and sustainability.

Jaffna District Team

As the focus of the military engagement between the Government and the LTTE has shifted to the North, the Jaffna Team continues to be under restricted movement. Planning the work of the team is sometimes a challenge as it is difficult to reach contacts in remote areas ahead of time, and the Government requires 72-hour notice to travel to some areas, making timely response to developing situations difficult.

The team received three new family cases this month regarding security clearance issues, harassment and threat concerns. Two previous cases required immediate follow-up, with some families still attempting to leave the peninsula. Widespread fishing restrictions on civilians, and other limitations and displacements, continue to cause hardship and loss of income for thousands. The team continued to provide international presence and trust-building in two vulnerable areas of the District, meeting with government servants in those areas, a new religious leader, and a local NGO that the team would like to develop more collaboration with regarding peace and nonviolent conflict resolution activities. The team was invited to the passing out (graduation) ceremony of another partner organization that trains youth to become human rights defenders.

Some of these youth have gone on to participate in internship opportunities in the capital facilitated by the Colombo Response Team and other partners.

The team visits regularly five other NGOs that do not have international staff on site, to check on any concerns or staff security issues, but all reported that they have been able to carry out their programs this month. A visit was made to the University campus, following a request from the warden of the student hostel for NP presence after a grenade was thrown near security personnel across from the university. Visits were also made to monitor the situation at the Jaffna prison and at two rehabilitation centers where women and children have sought safety. These families feel unsafe to be in their homes following the arrest or disappearance of their husbands, or have themselves received direct threats.

As all INGOs and local organizations are required to keep in close contact with the Government regarding their activities, the team did a presentation on the work of the team to the Government Agent, local Security Force representatives, and other INGOs. The presentation was well-received, with the General Commander suggesting that NP visit another vulnerable area that the team has not yet developed contacts in. He also suggested the team visit another rehabilitation center where “surrenderees” are housed. These are reportedly former LTTE cadres who have sought the protection of the government. The team will further explore the advisability and opportunities of involving themselves in these areas.

Trincomalee District Team

As part of the Eastern Province, Trincomalee (along with Batticaloa and Ampara to the south) were focused on the Provincial Council elections throughout late April and the first half of May. (See Context section above). In the course of supporting NPSL’s election monitoring partner organization, PAFFREL, the team met with many election stakeholders, including government officials, security forces, political party representatives and civilians. Security levels increased due to elections, with more road blocks and search operations being conducted. In some operations grenades, weapons, and anti-personnel mines were discovered. NP supported local monitors provided by Sarvodaya in observing the pre- and post-election environment, and a number of meetings were held with other international actors throughout the month regarding the security situation.

Armed activity seemed to increase the first part of the month, with a Black Tiger suicide mission accused of sinking a Sri Lanka Navy ship in the Trinco harbor just hours before the polls were due to open. The Human Rights Commission received 11 reports of abductions in a 10 day period before and after the election, with other killings and missing persons cases reported to other agencies. Reports were that abductions for ransom were on the rise. While more people and shops were observed to be open in the early evenings, people reported limiting their movements to their own ethnic areas, especially after 7 or 8 pm. Some Sinhalese expressed fear to go to Trinco Town; Tamils expressed fear to go to Mutur town.

Trinco team continues to monitor regularly two IDP camps, one at Cultural Hall and the other at Alias Garden, visiting others as field work takes them to other parts of the district. Safety and security issues are monitored and identified needs are conveyed to appropriate agencies and authorities. Current concerns voiced are lack of good nutrition, accessibility of schooling in some areas, domestic violence, and security. Working with a number of active Peace Committees, NP supports community-based efforts aimed at bringing different communities together across issues and boundaries. This month they met with four Peace Committees to

discuss any early warning signs of communal tensions erupting in Trinco, as was occurring in Batticaloa District to the south.

Peace Committees were able to defuse some tensions in Mutur; and a one-day hartal in protest of fishing restrictions affecting Muslim fisherfolk resulted in an easing of restrictions the following day, but not to the extent that the fishermen say is needed. Prevailing insecurities precipitated one NGO to request NP accompaniment for their local staff to a remote area to carry out their activities. In many cases, Peace Committees remain relatively inactive except in times of crisis or violence; the challenge is how to build their capacity so that they can become more consistently pro-active, and not just reactive.

Child and family protection activities continued, with five new cases of abduction or extortion being recorded. Linkages for a variety of family needs and follow-up were made to other service providers and resources, including NRC, UNHCR, ICRC, HRC, and a local NGO. NP Trinco has been asked to spearhead child protection meetings in Kantale where there is limited awareness and organization on the issue. The establishment of a district 'Safe House' for youth is still progressing, with multi-agency participation and the District Probation Office coordinating. Trinco Team was joined by a member of the Jaffna Team to participate in a special all-team training on child rights, child participation, and child protection strategies, the result of a collaboration with Save the Children/Sri Lanka, through an expert in child rights from Save the Children/Norway. Following completion of the 3-day training in Trinco, the training was repeated for NPSL staff in Batticaloa District.

Batticaloa District Teams (Valaichchenai and Batti Town)

In Batticaloa District both NP teams were busy with election-related activities, including observing at 26 polling stations on Election Day, and responding to several violent incidents the first half of the month. The latter part of the month saw a spike in post-election Tamil-Muslim violence that spread alarm throughout the District and into Trinco District to the north. Throughout the latter part of the month, both District teams worked tirelessly to bring stakeholders from all sides together so that discussions reported in the media to be happening at the upper political levels between party leaders could have a parallel hearing at the grassroots levels. Numerous individual contacts and meetings were held to lay the groundwork to bring representatives together in larger forums--forums that included Tamils and Muslims, religious and community leaders, government actors, police and the Security Forces.

The focus of the communal violence was in communities on either side of Batti Town, in and around two of the three main Muslim towns in the District, Eravur

and Kattankudy. For several days the violence restricted movement to and from Batti Town, causing disruption to many civilians, including NP local staff, who were unable to travel through either Eravur or Kattankudy at various times to get to or from the office. Hundreds of families living in border areas between the two communities fled their homes and sought safety in churches or other community centers. NP was able to visit several of these make-shift camps and convey to other agencies the immediate needs for relief the families shared.

The third main Muslim community is located further to the north in the Valaichchenai/Oddamavadi area. Tamil-Muslim violence did not spread to the north, thanks in part to the active involvement of networks that are functioning with the support of NPSL. The Valaichchenai Traders Association, made up of Tamil and Muslim businesses, requested NP to host a meeting where 30 traders came together to discuss how to prevent violence from spreading in their area. The Community Information Network (CIN) that NP has been facilitating also came together and took their first joint Tamil-Muslim action, which was to write a joint letter of appeal and elect a delegation to approach the police and Security Forces, with NP accompaniment, to request more patrols in the border areas between Tamils and Muslims to reduce the possibility of violence erupting and displacement of families. The team also has made a practice of providing visible presence every Friday after prayers in the areas of the main mosques in and around Valaichchenai.

Other NP work continued as well throughout the month, including five family visits and five new cases of underage recruitment being recorded. Twelve requests for accompaniment within the district of threatened individuals were met. Numerous security meetings were called with other INGOs and UN agencies, as well as regularly scheduled meetings regarding Child Protection and Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) meetings, and IDP Protection and Resettlement meetings where important information is shared and coordination discussed. Numerous meetings were also hosted in both NP offices, including of families seeking missing relations who were forcibly taken earlier this year. A group of seven mothers made plans to visit newly elected TMVP leadership in the District, including the mayor of Batticaloa and the new Chief Minister of the Province, in the hopes that they will advocate with others in the party for the release of their loved ones.

NP plays a vital role in making linkages and communication networks function within the District, making full use of a variety of referral mechanisms and options to improve people's security and the realization of their rights. By partnering and communicating with a wide variety of actors, knowledge of and access to resources is increased. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), for example, has legal staff that rural clients in the northern part of the district can more readily

access and NRC can access the courts in Valaichchenai by making use of office space in the NP Valaichchenai office one and a half days a week. Such collaborations and relationship-building is paying dividends for families and communities despite the ongoing tensions and instabilities.

Rita Webb, Programme Officer, Colombo



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

June / July 2008

Brief on the Situation in Sri Lanka

Progress of the execution of the Government of Sri Lanka's war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the North of Sri Lanka continued to dominate the news, if not the lives, of all within the country. The Government appeared to remain convinced that the LTTE has been severely crippled the last two years and can be eradicated as a fighting force by the end of this year. Many other voices, nationally and internationally, are voicing their concerns that the plague of terrorism could continue in clandestine forms for many years to come in Sri Lanka, regardless of what happens on the battlefields, unless a political solution to Asia's longest-running civil conflict is also pursued along with the military strategies.

Despite entering into political coalition with the President's party and winning Provincial Council elections in the East in May, the TMVP political party, which broke from its affiliation with the LTTE in 2004, has claimed that they will not disarm until the LTTE is wiped out, despite the government's official position that only police and security forces are empowered to bear arms. According to repeated reports, the LTTE are said to be operating in scattered cells throughout the East, carrying out periodic attacks on government forces and creating instability throughout other parts of the country. A bus bomb in Moratuwa, south of Colombo, in the first week of June, killed at least 23 and wounded dozens. And a suicide bomber in Vavuniya killed 12 policemen and wounded a couple dozen others, including four civilians.

Independent journalists continue to be banned from areas where the fighting is being carried out and from access to combatants, so verification of either side's reported casualty figures is impossible. Also dominating the news was the continued assault on media and defenders of a free press, with defense columnist Iqbal Athas calling this "the worst period in my 42-year career." He suspended his defense column in the Sunday Times in June. Mr. S. Tissainayagam, another prominent journalist and human rights activist (along with two other colleagues),

remained in custody for more than four months without charges, and national and international pressure was mounting in the case. In response, the President has appointed a ministerial level commission to investigate into the many allegations of threats, harassments and attacks on journalists.

Despite having lost its coveted seat on the UN Human Rights Council, the Government continued to reject the concept of international Human Rights monitors to document alleged abuses, claiming it is an unacceptable infringement of sovereignty. Concern from many sectors has been raised that this could also lead to loss of GSP+ tariff concessions of the European Community, especially for the garment industry. EU requirements for such favourable status require that countries adhere to as many as 27 international agreements, including protection of human rights and labour rights. The European Commission also reported it will withhold development aid funding to Sri Lanka, until the government addresses concerns about its human rights record. The EC says future funding will depend on resolving issues of access and security for humanitarian aid workers from the Red Cross and United Nations. Coming at the same time, Action Contra le Faim (AcF), the French humanitarian aid agency that lost 17 Sri Lankan staff in a massacre in Mutur in 2006 and withdrew from Sri Lanka in protest in March, is pressing their case in Europe for an international inquiry, citing failure of the Government of Sri Lanka to conduct a proper investigation until this time.

The cost of prosecuting the war and other global economic indicators are taking a toll on the whole society with inflation more than double any of Sri Lanka's neighbors. A general strike called by the JVP on July 10th was of mixed result in galvanizing national attention on the country's economic plight.

The Local Context and Work of the NPSL Teams

The Colombo Response Team (CRT)

The situation in Colombo was generally calmer in June and July than it had been in earlier months when there were numerous bus and train bombings in and near the capital. For the CRT, referrals from various stakeholders and from the NP field sites are expanding and resulted in an increase in demands on the team. The team has done more than 40 accompaniments during this time period, supporting at risk and threatened individuals and families to access a wide variety of resources and services, pursue legal or human rights channels, and improve their immediate or longer-term security. CRT was also asked to provide international presence in court in one human rights case.

The team worked closely with local human rights partners and the UN Office of Human Rights, and established contacts with a number of governmental and non-

governmental agencies. NPSL's relationship with the national Human Rights Commission is strengthening, resulting in more pro-active involvement and advocacy by the headquarters of that important national institution. Contacts within the Christian community were also expanded when the team met again with the Anglican Bishop and a representative of their

Reconciliation and Peace Desk.

The team participated in a National Peace Council (NPC) program on "Promotion of Peace Through Peace Education and Peace Activism." An outcome of the programme was the formation of a South Asia Peace Alliance, which may prove of interest to NPSL work in the future. CRT also regularly attends the Protection Working Group on IDPs (internally displaced persons) and hopes to contribute, with the input from our field sites, to a "protection gap analysis" that the PWG will undertake.

Jaffna District Team

Although the fighting between the government forces and the LTTE continues to be focused in the north with increasing intensity in various areas, the Jaffna Team remains able to carry on its work, despite limited or no access to some parts of the Jaffna peninsula. Families report fear of imminent displacement, as the progress of the war is unpredictable. With a gradual diminishment in the number of international organizations on the Jaffna peninsula, the NP team seeks to show consistent international presence in several vulnerable areas, but field visit plans are often delayed or changed depending on the security situation. In addition to the heavy military presence and activity, the lack of health and legal services in many areas, the on-going restrictions on fishing and the high security zones, the high cost of living, limited mobility and livelihood options, and high rates of alcohol-related domestic abuse, all conspire to make life a continual challenge for war-affected families in the North.

The international organizations and UN agencies that remain in Jaffna are in constant contact with one another, and NP is an integral member of all forums. NP Jaffna members attended a program for World Day Against Child Labour, an island-wide concern as families get pushed further into poverty. The focus of the team's work continues to center on human rights and human security, with frequent meetings with local human rights defenders and HR organizations. The team is also following up with human rights defenders who participated in the NP-sponsored training on international standards of human rights reporting and documentation in Colombo last March.

Trincomalee District Team

The political situation in Trincomalee has been somewhat more stable in the post-election period following Provincial Council (PC) elections in May, although news reports continue to be posted regarding extortions, intimidation, some reported abductions, and the killing in Trinco town of an insurance business man. The Tamil-Muslim violence that plagued Batticaloa District in May and early June did not spill over into Trinco District, as had been feared. To that end, the Trinco team continued to help bridge relationships between Hindu and Muslim groups in the post election period in Kinniya.

In the beginning of June security was heightened for the Provincial Council inauguration ceremonies. Security Force presence was increased in Trinco Town, and several explosives and weapons caches were reportedly found in search operations at various times. North of the district is a Forward Defense Line, demarcating a line of military engagement between the government forces and the LTTE. Some people fleeing the fighting to the north and making their way to Trinco are reported to have been sent by boat to IDP camps on the west coast in Mannar District. Nighttime movements of civilians are limited but shops and 3-wheelers are generally operating until 8 or 9 at night. Fishermen can now go out to fish at 5 am instead of 6, a slight improvement from previous fishing restrictions.

NP Trinco Team continues to be based in Trinco Town, with regular visits to the NP office in Mutur and key divisions in the south of the district. The team does regular monitoring of several IDP camps and is providing regular presence in remote areas in the south of the district, particularly in the areas of Seruwila and Mutur, and in Sinhalese-Tamil border areas where land issues are simmering. The UNHCR requested NP's participation in monitoring four IDP camp resettlement operations, and the IDP section of the district Human Rights Commission is seeking regular collaboration with the team for follow-up monitoring. The team attended a district forum with the local commanding officer to discuss mutual interests and needs and improving civil-military relations.

The team facilitated linkages with two Peace Committees to UNHCR and UNICEF to encourage stronger protection links in their communities by UN agencies. For two other Committees, NP facilitated a meeting with a local peace activist and a British minister visiting the district with representatives of the British High Commission. The local actors from different areas seemed to increasingly recognize the benefits of collaboration, and visibility was given at higher levels to grassroots initiatives by local Peace Committees.

Batticaloa District Teams (Valaichchenai and Batti Town)

While the government has worked hard over the past year to stabilize and secure the East, there is much work still to do and reported widespread civilian

insecurities. The teams are not able to fulfill all the requests made of them due to capacity limitations. The post-Provincial Council election violence between Tamils and Muslims that erupted during May and early June thankfully diminished thereafter, but tensions remain and political rivalries often take a violent turn. There were grenade attacks on the homes of at least two political party leaders, with two security personnel injured in those attacks. Intra-Tamil political rivalries appear to be contributing to destabilization of the district, with visible weapons reappearing outside some political offices following a number of tit-for-tat killings. Police have also been targeted, with four being killed in a brief period in Batti town. Reports of extortion are frequent, even of government employees, and many businesses are suffering under repeated extortion demands by armed actors.

In Valaichchenai the Team continued to help develop and support the Community Information Network, a consortium of more than 20 small Tamil and Muslim community-based organizations initiated by NP at the beginning of the year and which is steadily gathering in strength and confidence. Additional outreach to religious leaders, Security Forces, and the Union Traders Association also appear to have been positively received and helped to minimize Tamil-Muslim tensions in the northern part of the district.

Heavy family casework and numerous accompaniment requests dominate the teams' schedules. Strong partnerships with government agencies, security forces, national and international NGOs, as well as tapping local resources and national networks, allows the teams to provide early and emergency responses which help families address their pressing protection and human rights concerns. These involve assistance with safe access to resources or services, to reporting or advocacy mechanisms, to responsible political or military authorities, or to safer locations. Work related to Child Protection is ongoing, with continued work with some families who, until now, have been unable to secure the release of their children or other family members from armed actors.

IDP camp and resettlement monitoring is a regular part of the teams' work as well, including participation in a number of national and international protection and coordination forums. In conjunction with the Ministry of Disaster Management & Human Rights and the GA's office (Government Agent's), UNHCR has also invited NP to be part of "Confidence Building and Stabilization Measures" discussions and activities for IDPs in the district.

NP staff from all districts were able to enhance their technical skills during this time period through a Child Rights/Child Protection/Child Participation training from a Norwegian expert seconded to NP from Save the Children/Norway. Several staff were also able to participate in a UNICEF-sponsored workshop on reporting

and monitoring mechanisms under UN Resolution 1612, which tracks at the international level human rights violations against children.



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

August 2008

The first week in August saw the completion of the 15th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Conference, amidst intense security causing havoc with Colombo transportation. The eight SAARC countries include: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Sri Lanka was keen to assume the chairmanship and host the conference, deploying 19,000 extra police and soldiers in the capital. The Tamil Tigers, classified as a terrorist group by many countries, including India, had declared a 10-day unilateral truce starting from July 26 as a goodwill gesture for the summit but the Sri Lankan government dismissed it, saying it had received no official notification and was skeptical about the declaration.

Of particular significance for Sri Lanka was the meeting between President Mahinda Rajapaksa and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, where the Prime Minister was to raise a number of issues of concern to New Delhi. Chief among them were India's stated position that there is no military solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the need to evolve a political solution through the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) process.

As an observer to the SAARC proceedings, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher reiterated that Sri Lanka must act to prevent human rights abuses, including abductions, the intimidation of media personnel, and the recruitment of child soldiers as it fights a long-standing civil war against Tamil Tiger rebels. "We have been concerned about the continuing reports of abductions, disappearances, the detention of some people, and reports of intimidation against the media," Boucher said. This year alone, 12 journalists have been attacked, and one hacked to death. Media groups say there has been a failure of adequate investigations or apprehension of any of the attackers.

In one of Sri Lanka's several high profile freedom of speech cases, journalist J.S. Tissainayagam has been held by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) with two of his colleagues for more than five months before being charged with publishing and distributing a magazine and editing a news website alleged to have

brought the government into disrepute. He is also accused of collecting money from non-governmental organizations for running the magazine. The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the Colombo High Court's indictment of the journalists on terrorism charges for articles published in 2006. He was denied bail and will go to trial in mid-September.

The government's military strategy continues to be pursued in the North, buttressed by the President's party having won crucial Provincial Council elections held in two more of the country's nine provinces. Their victory was called an "endorsement" to carry on with the military offensive aimed at recapturing rebel-held areas. The main opposition party, however, categorically rejected the results of the elections, saying they did not portray the true aspirations of the voting public.

In the meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) continues to pursue a major offensive and is now closing in on the LTTE's political headquarters of Kilinochchi, held by the Tigers since November 1999. It is said the fall of Kilinochchi would likely be a tremendous blow to the LTTE, both in terms of lost territory as well as morale. Kilinochchi houses the LTTE's administrative infrastructure, including its judicial and police headquarters and peace secretariat. The LTTE have tacitly admitted they are losing ground. In terms of casualties, with no independent monitoring or access by media, all reported figures are essentially unverifiable and both sides dispute the other's figures.

Predictably, it is again the civilians, caught between the fighting forces and within the contested territories, who are finding it impossible to keep out of harm's way. An estimated 200,000 persons are reported to be on the move in the Vanni, looking for places of safety from artillery and air bombardments on the one hand, and enforced arms training and conscription on the other. Aid agencies say 134,000 displaced people are in Kilinochchi district alone, and more than half of the population has abandoned their homes in the last three months.

Humanitarian groups have urged both parties to allow civilians to move to safer areas and to receive needed assistance. As a recommended first step needing to be taken now, it is suggested the government of Sri Lanka, the LTTE and the International Committee of the Red Cross agree on opening up a humanitarian corridor to enable the people to leave. A number of religious leaders also made a similar appeal. A second step in the process of ensuring safety to the civilian population would be to establish a safe sanctuary to which people could go. Entry into this place of safety would be open to anyone, so long as they are unarmed.

The last Saturday of the month at least 45 persons were wounded when a bomb exploded in Colombo around noon in a busy market area. Saturday's bombing was

the first in the capital since May 16, when a suicide bomb attack blamed on rebels killed 12 people, including eight policemen, and wounded 85 others. On June 6, another bomb hit a crowded passenger bus just outside the capital, killing 21 people. The August bomb was concealed under a roadside stall displaying fake designer watches in the busy Pettah area of the capital, a short distance from the main bus station and the railway terminal, and came a day after the rebels accused government forces of setting off a roadside bomb and killing two civilians inside rebel-held territory.

A Washington-based think tank, Fund for Peace, and Foreign Policy magazine moved Sri Lanka up in its rankings on their Failed States Index (FSI) for 2008. Sri Lanka's scores dropped in most of 12 indicators on the FSI, moving the country from 25th to 20th position. Five of the eight South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries, accounting for one-quarter of the population of South Asia, are ranked among the 35 critically failed states of the world in this year's Index. Scores on the Index are based on tens of thousands of articles from different sources and reviewed by experts.

The Work of the NPSL Teams

In the four districts where NPSL has its field offices—Colombo, Jaffna, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa--the work of the teams is currently organized into four focal point areas, and is shared in monthly reports to government representatives in the districts. While work in one of these areas sometimes crosses over to other areas, what follows is a summary of some of the key issues and activities under NPSL focal areas in August.

Children, Youth & Families

Despite the best intentions of many individuals, organizations, agencies and other stakeholders in and out of government, the Sri Lankan conflict continues to take a huge toll on children, youth and families, especially on the protection needs of the rural poor in the north and east of the country. Much of NP's early and emergency response work centers on children, youth and families. NPSL works in weekly, even daily collaboration with others to support families and mitigate the effects of the conflict on their lives and the lives of their children.

In August, NPSL teams responded to a variety of requests. In some cases individuals and families were assisted in reaching a safer location to address both shorter- or longer-term insecurities. Too many under-aged children continue to be targets of armed actors, including in government-controlled areas, such as a 13-year-old who was able to reach safety with NP's accompaniment following his escape from an armed group. In some cases, other family members are targeted

following the escape of someone; for example, a younger sibling was threatened when his elder brother escaped from a camp. NP was able to help the family find an alternative solution to protect the younger child with the help of networks within the district.

One family chose to report the abduction of their under-aged son, but feared to raise their profile and suffer possible further repercussions. In another case, an under-aged boy with developmental disabilities was reported by his family to have joined an armed group voluntarily, but his family sought to get him released with NP's and ICRC's support. In another family, a sister received direct threats following the escape of her brother, forcing the family to relocate both their children. In yet another case, a father who had been forcibly taken into an armed group's camp was able to get released due to combined action by NP, ICRC, and the local police.

Helping families build their confidence and experience in advocating directly themselves with various authorities is another support that NP teams provide. This month several mothers were assisted to approach directly a camp in a remote area where they believed their sons were being held. They were not allowed to see them that day, but they at least received confirmation that their sons were there, one step in relieving their ever-present anxiety about the fate of their children. In some cases, NP has worked with mothers over a long period of time, building their capacity for nonviolent engagement. These mothers continue to grow in their confidence for self-advocacy with government and political authorities to demand that their children and families be protected. While the mayor in one town promised assistance earlier to a group of mothers but did not take any concrete action to follow-up on the women's requests for assistance, the mothers made their own phone calls and gained an appointment this month.

In another district, NP will assist children under the UNICEF grant living with their mothers at a Rehabilitation Center, with the permission of the Court Magistrate, to travel securely to and from a school outside the Center. These are largely children whose fathers have disappeared and whose mothers entered the Rehabilitation Center programme for their family's protection. Thousands of families face similar difficult decisions day after day to try to keep their children safe.

Displacement and Resettlement

All the teams continue to be involved in protection needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the monitoring of resettlement areas for those who have been returned to their original villages or to another location if it is still not possible to return home. While this area of work sometimes requires emergency response, it

also requires ongoing activities of nonviolent engagement and confidence-building, protective presence, and advocacy and awareness at multiple levels. While the greatest displacement is currently happening in the north central part of the country, NPSL continues to be part of advocacy and protection networks at district and national levels serving this vulnerable population in the areas of our field sites. The government authorities, and supported primarily by UNHCR, are the lead entities on IDP's. NPSL coordinates and cooperates with them and other protection and humanitarian agencies to help maintain and monitor international standards for the care and protection of internal refugees. NP's role is to provide regular protective presence in identified camps and resettlement areas, as coordinated with other actors at the district levels, and to share information among the protection working groups and coordinating mechanisms.

Issues in August were somewhat typical of issues that always need attention, including varying levels of lack of access to livelihoods, health care, and education. In some cases, IDPs report that they were not properly consulted before resettlement, not given enough information on what the conditions are in the areas they are to be resettled, nor a choice of return. In one instance this month IDPs reported they were improperly "de-registered" in an IDP camp and their supports cut off in order to compel them to move to another area. Advocacy at the Colombo level allowed them to be re-registered. Often fear of what they will find when they are moved, or lack of infrastructure and security in the areas of return, create endless anxiety for people who have already suffered so much. In some areas in the East, there are repeated reports of LTTE re-infiltrating some areas, so being returned to some of the remote areas is seen to be quite insecure. In some situations people get reasonably settled in an area, their children enrolled in a local school, some source of food and a small income arranged, so being told to again shift and start over in yet another place can be disheartening.

NPSL staff capacity in one district was enhanced this month in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council working with us on sharing experiences, interview techniques, documentation and review of protection needs. NPSL also facilitated a meeting in which UNHCR and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights was able to share information on Confidence Building and Stabilization Measures directly with a network of grassroots organizations brought together by NP. One government agent told NP that international presence is needed in all resettled areas and he acknowledged NP's role in that process.

When it comes to displacement and resettlement issues, everyone works under difficult limitations, knowing that the only satisfying outcome for families is a quick return to a safe and stable situation in their home areas. But it is often a slow and unsatisfactory process to get there, and some conflict-affected families have been displaced for more than one or two decades in Sri Lanka.

Community-Based Structures

In all districts where we work, NPSL seeks to facilitate and support networks of community-based structures, particularly those networks composed of civilians who wish to participate in activities that promote and sustain peace among all communities and ethnicities and engage in nonviolent problem-solving at the grassroots level. Networks of human rights defenders in Jaffna, peace committees in Trincomalee, grassroots community organizations in Batticaloa have all benefited from the slow but steady work of confidence-building and nonviolent engagement that NP has emphasized in its grassroots activities.

In two of our districts in August, a major focus of community involvement came in the form of support for a variety of actors preparing community events to celebrate International Day of Peace on September 21st.

Events, large and small, will be held in many places in Sri Lanka, supported by many actors, with NP being a key partner in several of our field sites. NP is working, often behind the scenes, to coach and support these local actors who are “out front” every day bridging differences and building alliances in their communities. In Jaffna, key human rights actors and partners are planning a week long celebration of various activities in five vulnerable communities. In Batticaloa District both teams are working on both ends of the district with networks and partners planning to bring hundreds of people from all religious communities and ethnic groups for a day-long celebration that will feature a combined call for peace and the protection of human rights in Sri Lanka. Through its continual presence in the communities where NP lives and works, such networks, such grassroots collaborations, such celebrations are more possible in 2008 than would have been possible when we first arrived in 2003.

Human Rights

A final focal area of work for NPSL is the broad area of human rights. Human rights is often a cross-cutting issue, affecting many individuals, families and communities in a variety of ways, as reflected in the preceding three focal areas. In addition to NPs work with children, youth and families, with IDPs, with war-affected and vulnerable communities, NPSL also works closely with a variety of local actors who help those suffering fundamental and human rights abuses of various kinds, as well as advocate for and build awareness of the need for institutions and mechanisms that can promote and protect human rights for all Sri Lankans. NPSL provides accompaniment and presence for many vulnerable and threatened people, helping to enhance their immediate human security, and providing linkages to other resources and mechanisms that can both work to support them specifically and to engage actors at multiple levels for improving the

human rights situation in Sri Lanka. This includes some journalists, human rights defenders, and ordinary citizens who wish to enjoy the full benefits of living in a thriving democracy.

Rita Webb, Programme Officer



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

September 2008

Situation Summary in Sri Lanka

National news in Sri Lanka in September '08 focused all eyes on the north of the country, as Government Security Forces continued their military advance toward the LTTE's administrative and political capital of Kilinochchi. On the 5th of the month, the Government ordered the withdrawal by month's end of all international and local aid workers in the large LTTE-controlled area of the Vanni. According to a UN spokesman, about 70 offices from five UN agencies would have to be moved out. Residents of the town said a helicopter flew low overhead, dropping thousands of leaflets written in Tamil. The government leaflets said the rebels were facing huge defeats and urged civilians to save their lives by leaving for government-held territory.

Many civilians, fearing unknown conditions they could face, and some not wishing to be separated from family members caught up in the conflict, opted for moving further into interior jungle areas, making humanitarian assistance even more difficult to provide. Some people were reported to being both fearful of disregarding LTTE orders that they remain in the Vanni and of moving toward government-controlled areas.

The ICRC issued a statement urging both parties to the conflict to protect civilians, adding they were committed to staying close to those in need of humanitarian aid and would try to meet their most urgent needs, regardless of where the civilians would seek refuge. By month's end, it was estimated there were between 200,000 and 230,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Vanni, with most moving in areas north-east of Kilinochchi. Some students at Jaffna University expressed fears that they were no longer in contact with their families in the Vanni, as they don't know where they have gone and communication has been broken.

Representatives of Sri Lankan civil society also issued an appeal to the Government and to the LTTE:

- To respect and provide for the freedom of movement of civilians, staff of humanitarian agencies and their families, and medical teams as well as of transport of essential items in, to and from the Vanni;
- To ensure that humanitarian agencies are provided access to all IDP sites and their security guaranteed;
- To ensure that IDP sites are located away from military camps or other targets;
- To support independent monitoring of the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected communities in the Vanni; and
- To abide by international and national legal frameworks which provide for the protection of civilians and non combatants, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

In mid-September it was announced that every Sri Lankan who came to Colombo from the north in the past five years would have to re-register with police in a mass registration drive at police stations and other designated centers across the city. The order affects more than 100,000 people who came from the districts of Kilinochchi, Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaittivu, and the overwhelming majority of those people are ethnic Tamils. These citizens must fill up a one-page declaration giving details of their place of origin and purpose of their current stay. Tamils, just 18 percent of the country, make up as much as one-third of the capital's population, according to official statistics.

Divisions between the communities were underscored in the results of the August 2008 Peace Confidence Index Survey, in which it was reported a majority of the Sinhala community think that Sri Lanka is closer to a permanent settlement to the ethnic conflict than a year ago. However a majority of the Tamil and Up-Country Tamil communities think the opposite, saying that the country is 'not close at all' to a permanent settlement to the ethnic conflict. A majority of the Sinhala community think that the government defeating the LTTE is the way to end the war and arrive at peace in Sri Lanka, while a majority of the minority communities think the war should be stopped and political negotiations undertaken if peace is to be achieved.

Of interest in Sri Lanka from events abroad was legislation adopted this month in the USA which will permit the United States to prosecute foreign military commanders who recruit child soldiers abroad. The Child Soldiers Accountability Act makes it a federal crime to knowingly recruit or use soldiers under the age of 15 and permits the US to bring charges under the law against both US citizens and non-citizens who are in the United States.

Children are currently used in armed conflicts in at least 17 countries. It is known that recruiters in these countries prey upon children, who are often the most susceptible to threats and coercion. Child soldiers are used as combatants, porters,

guards, spies, messengers, unskilled labor, and other duties. The recruitment and use of children as soldiers was recognized in 1998 as a war crime under the International Criminal Court. What repercussions this legislation could have on Sri Lankan actors is not known.

The Context and Work of the NPSL Teams

The security situation in the country creates challenging environments at the field level as NP teams continue to serve the civilian populations. In the capital, checkpoints are ubiquitous and nationals are careful to travel with proper identification at all times. Fears of random bombings are ever-present, though September passed with only one smaller, and no major, attacks in the West. In the East there are increasing reports and rumors of the LTTE re-infiltrating jungle areas, with some clashes and attacks on military targets. Such events result in increased checking, cordon and search operations, and round-ups, which are both disruptive and frightening for civilians. In one round-up in Batticaloa 160 people were taken in; with smaller numbers of 32 and 35 reported in other operations. In most cases the majority of people are released within one day, and NP is often called upon by families to be present with them at police stations.

Tamil-Muslim communal violence remains a problem in Batticaloa. This month a Muslim man was killed in a Tamil area. Two days later two young Tamil men went missing when they took a goat to sell in a Muslim town. The NP team met with the Police and families of the missing youth, visiting both communities, and offering facilitation and communication between community leaders. When the body of one of the youths was found some days later, a harthal (or general strike) was called on the Tamil side, lasting for two days in the area where the dead youth was from. A shop was burned, allegedly for failure to honor the harthal. A threatening call was made to some organizations, so the INGO community also closed their offices. Then a grenade was thrown near a mosque and the Muslim Urban Council, injuring more than 20 people, including children, and 5 Tamils passing by. The second missing Tamil boy's body has not yet been found.

The monthly report of the North East Secretariat on Human Rights (NESoHR), based in the North, claims the toll on Tamils this month was 68 killed, 38 disappeared, 87 injured, 454 arrested and 36,000 newly displaced. The losses on all sides are not verifiable as independent journalists have no access. In Jaffna at least 9 civilians were reported killed this month, with more than 10 missing. An increase in search operations has resulted in more men surrendering for their protection to the Jaffna Prison, with their wives and children entering the Women's Rehabilitation Center. The NP Jaffna team is sometimes asked to accompany families as they surrender and is currently part of an effort to see that the children in the center can attend school. Conditions in both facilities are

difficult, made tolerable only by the belief that to remain at home is too dangerous. Curfew was instituted for a day or two in some areas, due to an attack on a military post.

A rumored 3-day curfew to be imposed in Jaffna Town, while the military provided continuous supplies to the Forward Defence Lines, caused panic and hoarding of essential goods. The curfew was not imposed, but a return to normal market supplies and prices takes a considerable amount of time, since supplies are not brought in consistently and regularly to the peninsula. There was also an increase in house robberies, including a neighboring house to the NP team, in which 3 men with swords entered the house and stole all the valuables.

NP-Jaffna, along with 10 other organizations, received an unsigned, undated letter saying they should all leave Jaffna by the end of September. Consultation with the authorities and an emergency security meeting concluded that the internationals would not heed the warning at this time, but would continue to maintain the highest vigilance for further signs or threats.

In the four districts where NPSL has its field offices—Colombo, Jaffna, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa--the work of the teams is organized into four focal point areas. While work in one of these areas sometimes crosses over to other areas, what follows is a summary of some of the key issues and activities for September 2008.

Children, Youth & Families

NP teams continue to coordinate with Unicef, Save the Children, government agencies, and other organizations, in meeting the rights and protection needs of children and youth. The safety net of a number of youth was enhanced with NP accompaniments and linkages with needed resources. A 13-year-old boy who had twice joined an armed group and been retrieved by his mother was assisted to enroll in a residential training program where he might be occupied in a more supervised environment and be able to learn some skills to increase his available options. Six youth finishing a training program were assisted to return home, where the parents considered safe enough to do so, and others to continue on-the-job training in a different location. Another youth, now 18, forcibly recruited by one armed group when he was younger and who had managed to escape, was later taken by a different armed group when he had returned home. Escaping a second time from this group, NP was able to help the youth to a place of safety where he hopes to learn a trade.

At the request of a local partner organization, international presence was provided for a day's outing for 55 youth so they could enjoy a day at one of the East's

beautiful beaches. On the beach members of the TMVP group (a political party but still an armed actor in the East) appeared to harass one of the youth. NP intervened, along with a staff member from the sponsoring organization. After some negotiations, including the assistance of some policemen patrolling the beach, the situation was resolved and the TMVP members said they would cause no further disruption.

In many areas there are very limited options for youth who return from having been part, either forcibly or voluntarily, of an armed group. In partnership with Unicef, NP has been part of a multi-agency and government coalition working together on a variety of CAAC (Children Affected by Armed Conflict) initiatives. In Trincomalee District the NP team is part of a long process of trying to establish a Safe House in the district for such youth, although the resistance has been strong from some quarters. In Batticaloa there is a strong initiative spearheaded by Terre des Hommes (TdH), a French child-focused organization, to establish, with government structures, Village Child Rights Monitoring Committees, which NP will coordinate with as these mechanisms for improved security and advocacy for youth develops.

Displacement and Resettlement

Protection work with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is a large part of the work of NP in Sri Lanka. Teams are also getting more involved with UNHCR's efforts, in conjunction with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, to initiate and strengthen a variety of Confidence Building and Stabilization Measures (CBSM) so the IDPs can safely be resettled in their home or another area of their choice. Teams have established relationships with certain IDP camps through monitoring activities over a period of time, and now in certain resettlement areas where these IDPs are being settled. When there are problems in these areas, it is often NP that will be notified, such as when fighting broke out this month in one of the resettled areas in Batticaloa District that the Valaichchenai Team was monitoring.

IDPs have also trusted NP to take letters of concern about being resettled to the authorities, when the IDPs have not been convinced that the area they are being resettled in is actually a stable and safe environment. This month permission was also given to NP to enter a resettlement area in the interior of Batticaloa that we were previously not allowed to go to. This is an important area to monitor as IDPs have complained that they are not allowed to take sufficient supplies to and from the resettlement areas following the attack on a TMVP camp in which both TMVP members and SLA were killed. From the Security Forces perspective, there was fear that supplies taken into the area could be used to support LTTE. NP will work with all parties to try to reach some resolution.

IDPs are a particularly vulnerable population, often getting caught up in cordon and search operations, and often not having all the proper documentation they need to justify their presence to the authorities or to travel in a certain area. Sometimes their identity cards are worn down or signatures are not readable, which creates problems for them and concerns for the authorities. Sometimes they are not registered with the local authorities. That too is a problem. Two IDP youth went missing this month near Batticaloa, with the NP Team supporting the families to approach authorities that they hope will help them locate their loved ones. In another case, an IDP was arrested in a round-up in Valaichcenai and kept in custody for 10 months in another area. The family remembered NP's earlier presence at the IDP camp and contacted the team to seek accompaniment for him upon his release this month.

For the Colombo Response Team, they are able to take the concerns and problems raised at the field level to the biweekly IDP Protection Meeting in Colombo. They also are able to communicate back to the teams information on the national efforts, including a National Consultation now underway which will be focusing on three intervention areas for IDPs in Sri Lanka: a) Land and property issues and compensation for what they have lost; b) addressing the challenges of long-term displacement (some IDPs have been displaced for 20 years); and c) the role of development actors in finding durable solutions for IDPs in Sri Lanka. The Consultation is based on the needs of the more than 312,000 IDPs currently seeking such durable solutions, a number that is likely to go up in the coming months with the military operations in the north.

Community-Based Structures

In September the bulk of the NP work with community-based structures was centered on preparations for International Peace Day on the 21st. Teams played various roles as part of preparations and participation in the day's events in all the districts in the North and East. In Jaffna the commemoration for Peace Day was actually over a whole week, involving many partners including Center for Peace and Reconciliation and World Vision, with hundreds of children, parents, community leaders and school personnel taking part in various activities. Such celebrations in the midst of war are beneficial for children and communities, and provide a hiatus in the violence and conflict so that a future of peace can be envisioned.

In Valaichchenai the team supported a key local partner in preparing for a large celebration of almost a thousand people that also brought Sinhalese school children and teachers from communities outside of the area, in a day-long, multi-ethnic celebration. Present also were representatives of all four major religions—

Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christian--as well as government officials and Security Force representatives. At this event the Executive Director of NP from USA, Mel Duncan, was also present and greeted the gathering with a message of peace and hope for the children of Sri Lanka. In Batticaloa the team members were the only international representatives and chief guests at two celebrations in the southern part of the District involving several hundred children, parents and community members.

As a result of this community-level involvement, the local networks that NP is a part of and in some cases facilitating are being increasingly strengthened and consistent channels of communication are developing. Other district, national and international actors are starting to also want to meet representatives of these networks, and the possibilities for identifying important training needs, information-sharing, and avenues for advocacy are increasing.

Human Rights

Some of the pressing human rights issues and concerns have already been referenced above. NP is increasingly relied on to respond when violations occur or advocacy is needed. In Colombo, CRT regularly responds to requests from human rights defenders to help them in helping others, for legal aid, for sanctuary, for access to human rights mechanisms. Cases are referred to NP from a growing list of community actors, including from high level religious leaders and political figures.

While the overall impact of the conflict on civilians throughout the country has eroded confidence and security over many years, sometimes the effects become suddenly even more immediate, threatening and disruptive, as in this case this month:

A Personal Story: Life Shattered by Visit of a Relative

A family in the east is visited by a relative from the north. This 'cousin-brother' may have had some previous association with LTTE, but was reported to have escaped from their service. His two visits to his relations in the East immediately put them in jeopardy, as someone in the area had noticed the northern cousin's visits and reported to the police and local TMVP (now in political coalition with the government). In mid-August they came to arrest the husband. He was not home at the time, so they arrested his wife and 6 month old baby and held them for four days. The husband learned of this and out of fear went into hiding.

Relations of the husband approached NP to seek assistance in helping the man surrender to the police, as they were afraid harm might come to him on the way. The team laid the groundwork over several days, holding numerous meetings with

the family and the local police to arrange for NP's accompaniment of the husband from his hiding place in an interior area to the police station in town. Finally they were given permission to bring him in.

Police needed to do an inquiry to determine if the husband, as accused by others, had ties himself to the LTTE. Some said he did. They said he had been involved in recent violent acts in the district. The family denied it. The husband was kept in custody, and his case was subsequently referred to the Courts. NP, with the family's permission, coordinated with ICRC and the Human Rights Commission. They followed up to ensure that the man was treated according to law while in custody. The wife said the family was so grateful to NP for having saved her husband's life. It was now up to the government and Sri Lankan legal processes to determine the truth.

The story is not over for the family, however. When the husband was released about a month later by the Court for lack of evidence, he was immediately threatened. His danger had not ended with his exoneration through the judicial process. He ran for his life back inside the Court building. For his protection the judge put him back into custody. He is again in prison. His family can visit him there. Their family life was shattered by the visit of a relation. What the future now holds for them, they do not know.

Rita Webb, Programme Officer



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

October 2008

Brief on Context for NP Teams in the Field

While security remains tight in the capital of Colombo and the war continues to be executed within the northeast of the country, the security situation where NPSL teams live and work in the North and the East is also fragile and unstable for civilians. This month the Tamil Tigers carried out their second air attack on the capital, hitting a power station and causing some turbine damage, while also targeting a military installation in Mannar District. Heavy monsoonal rains and stiff resistance has slowed the earlier Security Forces progress

On the national political front, TMVP political head, who goes by his nom de guerre of Colonel Karuna, was sworn in as a Member of Parliament. Concerns on this appointment were raised in international human rights circles, and a legal petition has been filed seeking to prevent his taking up the appointment.

Outside of the official war zone, there were many reports in the media and from communities of a variety of destabilizing incidents in the North and East – grenade and claymore attacks, targeted killings, including of security forces and police, reports of missing civilians, and hartals or enforced general shutdowns. Batti Team also saw an increase this month in the number of reported cases of abductions and forced recruitments into armed groups.

Continued reports of LTTE re-infiltration into the East are heard, with increased clashes between armed factions with competing loyalties within the TMVP itself. Colonel Karuna and the Chief Minister of the Eastern Provincial Council, Pillaiyan, provided a public show of unity in Batticaloa at a protest demonstration against Tamil Nadu's involvement in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. For the demonstration it was reported TMVP arranged 300 government busses to transport people from different areas of Batti district, including from some areas of Ampara district. According to one media source 20,000 people attended the rally. In one form or another, "unidentified armed groups" continue to wreak violence on armed and unarmed actors alike. In one attack on a TMVP office in the district, 4 cadres were killed and 5 more have gone missing from the office since the attack.

One of those killed was an under-aged youth whose family had earlier sought help from NP and other agencies in getting their boy released. For all too many families, help is too little or too late.

Tamil-Muslim tension continues to fester in Batticaloa as well, with a second grenade attack within a month at a mosque in Kattankudy. Four people were injured with no group claiming responsibility for the attack. While there are not many Sinhalese choosing to live in Batticaloa, there were two reported incidents of attacks and killings of Sinhalese civilians. In one incident 3 Sinhalese workers were shot dead in the south of the District and in another 5 Sinhalese workers were injured in a grenade attack just outside of Batti town. There was some heightened fear that these communal tensions would spill over to Trincomalee District, but they did not this month.

All of Batti district was affected by a full day enforced harthal, allegedly in protest of the bodies of two Tamil youth being found dead in the sea. The families had reported to NP that their sons were missing following arrest in a government search operation. The authorities told the families the boys would be released the following day, but when they failed to turn up in the morning, the families were told they had been released the night before instead. It wasn't until the bodies were found some days later that the families learned the fate of their sons.

While Trinco District seems calm on the surface, some reports still are received related to abductions, round ups, shootings and killings of individuals in and around Trinco Town. One man shot dead bore more than 32 bullets and his dead body was unattended on the road for two hours. One particularly vulnerable cohort of people in the East seems to be those returning for visits from working abroad. One person who was preparing to leave the country for a job in the Middle East went missing. Security around Government officials has increased, with mobile phones now being taken from visitors before entering government offices.

A harthal was also experienced this month in Jaffna, reportedly called by the EPDP in protest of a suicide attack on ships in KKS harbour. During strict harthals, the NP teams work from their residences, and national staff are not able to safely travel to work. While Jaffna was relatively calm in October, there was frequent out-going shelling and there were more SLA mortar positions set up during the month, including at least one new one near the NP office.

From public reports at least 3 people were killed and at least 2 reported missing in the Jaffna peninsula this month. Two fishermen went missing after the navy reportedly opened fire off the Point Pedro coast. An explosive device targeting SLA soldiers guarding the electricity transformer in Kokkuvil Jaffna was set off. Due to threats and perceived insecurities, at least 10 people, including 2 women,

surrendered to the courts seeking protective custody, joining scores of others who see also a lack of protective options for them and their families.

Key Areas of Focus in October 2008

Children, Youth & Families

NPSL teams coordinate activities with government authorities such as child protection units, probation officers and district secretaries; with Unicef, Save the Children Sri Lanka, local community groups, vocational training centers and other youth-serving facilities, and families. NPSL's focus is to support individual cases such as mothers searching for children or youth recently released or escaped from armed groups, and to strengthen the capabilities of local mechanisms to protect the safety and rights of children and their families. While both of these foci are critical and interrelated, the teams face a continual challenge to balance the time intensive needs of individual cases, with the capacity building work which is usually less of an emergency but offers the potential for longer term change. Examples of NPSL's work this month include:

NPSL was contacted by a family to assist their son, who had been an underage conscript, to access a safer location by attending a vocational training program. Youth whose education is interrupted at an early age find they have few options if they are able to return home. This boy had run away from a previous training program. The team took the time to gather all the facts regarding problems experienced and presented the case to a second facility so the staff there could properly assess the risks of enrolling the boy and to more fully discuss the matter with the family. In the end, the second program did accept him, but could do so with clarity about the challenges the boy presents. In another instance, while working with a youth-serving facility, the staff identified an unmet need for psycho-social counseling for the former young combatants they work with. NPSL staff connected them to a potential funder.

In Jaffna, there are many women and children in a rehabilitation center for their own safety. Often these are families whose husbands had been under severe threat and who surrendered themselves for their own safety to the Courts. The men are held in Jaffna Prison and their families are in the rehabilitation center. NPSL has been able to work cooperatively with Save the Children Sri Lanka and with funds provided from Unicef for small immediate needs, to provide safe transport to the children so that they can attend school.

Families in the east continue to report cases of forced recruitment or child abduction. Other threats to the safety and well being of children and families reflect the challenges of living in IDP camps and/or being resettled after displacement, often in areas where they report continued human security concerns,

and where the infrastructure—schools, hospitals, transport, markets--and livelihood options are currently limited or unavailable.

Displacement and Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The government, in conjunction with various international organizations, is working hard to resettle the remaining internally displaced people (IDPs) in the east. Some of these families have been displaced for many years, others for only a year or less. NPSL teams have been told the plan is to try to resettle all IDPs in the east by the end of the year.

The work relating to IDPs involves a complex set of relationships and activities. The IDP camps are affected by the presence, in some cases, of armed groups in their area, the activities of the military and police, and the civil authorities. Additionally UNHCR plays a significant role attempting to determine if all camps and resettlement efforts meet international standards and to advocate when this is not the case. There are also local and national civil society organizations involved. NPSL's role is to regularly monitor and to provide protective presence at critical times in a number of camps within the areas where we work. In particular NPSL provides presence in some of the more rural and hard to reach camps, where other humanitarian staff may be unable to visit, or are concerned for their safety if they do. NPSL has helped people who wish to advocate for themselves regarding when they will be resettled and where.

In addition NPSL has helped to bring attention to some of the tensions involved in resettlement. There have been allegations that Tamil families have been given land to cultivate that belongs to Muslim families. This plants seeds of communal tension and a potential flashpoint for violence. There are concerns that some resettlement villages are too far from schools, so the children will be unable to continue their schooling, or can only pursue schooling to a certain level, after which there are no facilities. There are concerns about the adequacy of water and overall safety and stability of the area. There are often discrepancies between various agencies about how many families and people are actually in a camp and have or have not yet been resettled and even where they have gone to.

NPSL has been present at several IDP camps just before the buses come to resettle families. NPSL staff have discussed with families if they are moving voluntarily and with confidence, and have shared with the responsible authorities any concerns raised. We have continued to follow up on concerns that in some communities IDPs have been unable to bring sufficient fuel or other needed items, including food, to the camps, given military concerns about resources reaching the LTTE instead of serving civilians. In some areas proposed for or actually resettled, there continue to be concerns about buried landmines.

A new but likely growing area of work is with IDPs in Jaffna. People are moving out of the Vanni, a large area to the south of Jaffna District, due to continued fighting. The army and police have security concerns too about people moving out of areas that have been controlled by the LTTE for many years. Thus the level of screening, potential security risks, and long term isolation from others is expected to be high. The NPSL Jaffna team is becoming involved with this emerging reality on behalf of vulnerable civilians.

Protection and Promotion of Human Rights

In its human rights work, NPSL continues to support civilians seeking to protect their own rights, while simultaneously supporting Sri Lankan organizations to strengthen their efforts to ensure all mechanisms that support human rights are accessible and operate appropriately. All NPSL teams respond to individual cases of rights violations such as forced recruitment, disappearances, threats, involuntary resettlement, misappropriation of land, extra-judicial killings and arbitrary arrests.

Teams provide both short and long term accompaniment to individuals and families to assist them to use existing mechanisms, such as meeting with local civil authorities, to inquire about missing relatives, to access youth-serving facilities, and to move to longer term safer places. The teams continue to respond to inquiries from others working to support peace and human rights efforts at the grassroots levels to learn first-hand about specific conditions and challenges faced by vulnerable families and their children..

The Colombo Response Team (CRT) continues to both provide accompaniment for threatened individuals and families coming to the Colombo area to access human rights and justice mechanisms and resources, and to represent the field sites in national level meetings and processes. Recently they have strengthened their relationship with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka in regards to civilian rights and safety. They have been requested to consider the needs of journalists for safety, and also provide protective presence to human rights promoters in the Colombo area.

Rita Webb, Acting Country Director

Ellen Furnari, Acting Grants/Communications Officer



FIELD REPORT: SRI LANKA PROJECT

November 2008

The Context for the Sri Lanka Teams

For the NP teams in Batticaloa, the second half of November was an exceptionally turbulent period. A sharp spike in targeted killings, with 15 reported in one night, included four members of the same family, with only an 11-year old boy surviving unharmed. Other members of this family later came to seek support from the NP Batti team. In separate incidents, two other children, an 8 year old and a 1 year old were reported shot by armed intruders in their homes. A Hindu priest serving at a main temple in Batti Town was killed, as well as a local staff member of a Sri Lankan NGO. A local humanitarian worker of an international NGO was taken from his home and executed. A Sinhala doctor was killed by unidentified gunmen in the southwest of Batti district. The following day medical staff from Batticaloa Teaching Hospital held a protest demonstration against the killing. Government and police offered more security and protection of all Sinhala medical staff who are working in the district. The teams were also impacted by threats against family members of one of their own local staff.

The killing near Colombo of the personal secretary to Pillayan, the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province, caused further backlash in the District. In Valaichchenai local armed cadre of the TMVP increased their presence in Tamil neighbourhoods and civilians were told not to be out on the streets after dark. The NP team liaised with the Security Forces to try to reduce the vulnerability in the areas of the NP office and residences. Several incidents of grenade and claymore attacks on the government's Security Forces and TMVP offices were also reported.

On 28th of November a protest demonstration was held in front of the Gandhi statue in Batti town to protest against the killings of civilians in the district. Around 100 people took part in the demonstration, which was called by some local politicians, and members of Batticaloa Municipal Council, including the Mayor. Demonstrators demanded an immediate stop to the killings and abductions in the district. The following day, an unexpected full day police curfew (6am - 6pm) was imposed throughout the district, suspending the work of the teams. Joint round-up

and search operations of the Security Forces were carried out in many areas of the district, with around 700 people being arrested. However, most of the people were released after few hours of inquiry or within 24 hours.

The difficulties in Batti District did not seem to spill over into Trinco District, and the ground situation was relatively stable there, as the team continued to scale back their operations in preparation for a February phase-out. No killings were observed in or around Trincomalee Town and civilian movement and family life seem generally normalized with people using public spaces.

In Jaffna, the intensity of shelling, as heard from the NP office and residence, was less than previous months. But continuous heavy fighting in the area reduced the mobility of the team. At least three people were killed and at least eight went missing in the Jaffna peninsula this month. At least one family surrendered to the Court to be placed in protective custody, and, at least two decomposed bodies were washed ashore. Some families made their way from the Vanni to Jaffna, including more than 50 adults and children. These families are being held in an IDP camp with restricted access. A former university student was killed and after that the university was subjected to intense checking. Later in the month a threat notice was issued inside the university, targeting 14 people, including 5 lecturers and the hostel warden.

During a field visit to the Varani area, team members encountered ongoing shelling and left the area immediately. Frequent cuts in mobile coverage occurred throughout the month, and heavy rains disrupted electricity, including for one 3-day stretch. The team was able to liaise with other INGOs to charge mobile phones and laptops. Later in the month, because of the floods, there were lengthy landline and electricity outages and flights were grounded.

The Work of the NPSL Teams

The NPSL teams in Jaffna, Trinco, Valaichchenai, Batticaloa and Colombo participated in more than 100 coordination meetings and field activities in November, and handled more than 50 new and follow-up cases documenting protection needs and human rights violations, including cases of disappearance, forced recruitment, abduction, death threats, and vulnerability following escape from an armed group. The work of the teams can be viewed as falling into four programmatic areas, as outlined below.

Children, Youth & Families

NPSL teams work with government authorities and local, national and international organizations to prevent harm to children, youth and families and to help increase their safety and well being. NPSL is part of networks in all districts

where we work, that address child protection and human security. NPSL works to support the effectiveness of these organizations and networks in improving the security and human rights for children and families.

NPSL responds to requests from individuals, families and other organizations on specific cases of civilian vulnerability, especially children and youth. In Batticaloa NPSL provided protective presence and accompaniment to assist families in resolving cases of underage recruitment, missing family members, and other threats to their security. NPSL uses its relationships with the police, the army, other civil authorities, UNICEF, vocational training centers, and other organizations to connect families with services and institutions that can assist them.

For instance, in one district NPSL staff accompanied a youth who escaped from an armed group to a vocational training center where life-long skills could be gained in a safer environment. When this youth received further threats, staff assisted the family in identifying another option. More than two dozen vulnerable youth were directly assisted in November. In some cases, the community structures that serve vulnerable youth are also in need of support. In one instance this month NP responded to an emergency call from a service provider when one of the youth they were trying to assist was threatening another youth. The partners NP regularly works with know that they can count to NP when they themselves are in difficulty as well, and it increases their capacity to do the difficult work of providing direct services to vulnerable youth that only they can provide.

In Jaffna, NPSL worked to support the needs of university students cut off from their families in the Vanni. While not technically youth (i.e., under age 18), these young people depend on support from their families for their living and school expenses while trying to continue their studies in a war zone. With the current fighting in the North, it has not been possible for them to be in contact with their families. In addition to the deep worry about their families' well being, the students have the very concrete problem of needing food and subsistence support. NPSL worked with other agencies to bring the needs of these students to the attention of school authorities and other service providers, who are now providing some aid to them.

As part of its on-going protective presence, NPSL visits some of the more rural resettlement communities. These communities have trouble accessing services and attention. During one visit, family members asked for help from NPSL in locating a youth who had been pressured to join an armed group. NPSL assisted them to report the incident to the appropriate authorities and made UNICEF aware of the case. While this case in particular is still unresolved, in some instances, after attention by international actors, sometimes the youth in question is able to return

home. In Batti, coordinated activities also included this month participation in a Child Rights Workshop sponsored by Terre des Hommes, along with six other partners; and participation in UNICEF's Annual Planning discussion for 2009 with Unicef staff and other child rights partners in the district. In Trinco there has been close collaboration with the government's Department of Child Protection on monitoring children's homes. Although phasing out, the Trinco team provided presence and accompaniment to several youth when no other organization could fill that need. All teams regularly participate in district level child protection forums and events.

Displacement and Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

NPSL continues to address the situation of IDP camps and the resettlement of IDPs. People are displaced for different reasons and for varying amounts of time. Some people were displaced by fighting many years ago, and have been in camps for over a decade. Others are displaced because their homes are now in high security zones established by the armed forces in the last several years. Some people were recently displaced in the last year or two, as the fighting intensified in the East and in the Vanni.

People who have been in IDP camps for awhile may have established deeper roots in their current locations, with children in local schools and livelihood in the local community. They may be located in less rural areas than before. Thus one of the tasks for NPSL when visiting people in camps that are scheduled to be closed, with the inhabitants resettled elsewhere, is to inquire if people are moving freely and voluntarily. If anyone reports otherwise, NPSL brings this to the attention of the proper authorities, and may support the families advocating for themselves. NP teams monitored several returns in November and participated in all forums regarding the protection and rights of IDP's, coordinating with others to help ensure international standards are met.

People in the camps often feel vulnerable to threats and there have been a number of abductions reported from the camps in the east and north. As NPSL visits some of the camps and resettlement villages with regularity, people have come to know and rely on us. In one resettlement area that NPSL staff visit, the community reported experiencing a number of difficulties related to armed groups in the area. One person reported to NPSL that some of the threats were related to having INGO visits. This alarmed our staff and we asked if it would

be better if we didn't come. The person said, no, it would be much worse. He asked the team to please continue to come visit the area. This reflects both the perceived value of our work and also the bravery of people and their desire to resist threats and find nonviolent ways to increase their own security. In some cases people have taken the initiative to call NPSL when they have a concern,

rather than waiting for NPSL to return on our own schedule. NPSL networks with the police and Sri Lankan Army, as well as UNHCR and ICRC and district protection networks, on cases of abductions and missing persons, as well as on other community concerns.

In Jaffna there is a higher percentage of area that is designated as high security zones. Loss of homes and access to livelihoods is a constant pressure on families and communities in these zones. Currently there are also new challenges related to IDPs coming from LTTE controlled areas where the fighting has been at its most intense. New IDP camps have been set up and it is not clear when or how people there will be able to reconnect with family they have been separated from. If they are allowed to move freely into other areas, there are concerns for their safety. NPSL tries to regularly visit some of these camps, but given security issues and transportation difficulties, and now monsoon, there can be several weeks between visits.

Protection and Promotion of Human Rights

Protection and promotion of human rights is a large part of the work of NP, whether it is on behalf of children and youth, families, displaced populations, or the organizations and individuals who serve them. Representative activities in this focal area this month in Jaffna included two joint visits with the Court Magistrate to the prison and the Women's & Children's Rehabilitation Center, where families under severe threat have had to turn themselves over for protective custody. The conditions of these facilities are quite minimal and the Magistrate expressed concern about the safety and welfare of people in protective custody, which NP is helping to monitor.

The president of the Jaffna University Student Union called and asked NP to meet him and other student union officers. They told how two men on a motorbike had come that morning and forced a student to put a leaflet on the walls. The leaflet identified 14 names including students and lecturers. They didn't have a specific request but wanted to inform ICRC and NP of the threat. NP provides periodic protective presence at the University, particularly at times of specific incidents. The team also met the vice chancellor regarding student vulnerabilities. In Trinco the team worked with a dozen human rights cases this month and visited vulnerable areas where there is a heavy armed presence. In one area the team's presence was recognized and appreciated by a local religious leader.

The NP teams provided protective accompaniment to approximately two dozen individuals and participated in all the district interagency and protection working group meetings. The Colombo Response Team (CRT) undertook 12 accompaniments for individuals and family members under threat in November. Two partners accommodated five individuals referred by CRT.

In Batti, the team worked with local human rights defenders and the Batti Peace Committee to help prepare 19 families to complete and file complaints regarding the Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance of family members. While specific positive outcomes seldom result for a family undertaking such a process, many families feel that it is only through using all available mechanisms that justice will ever be served. In addition, the team visited nine families with missing family members. The impact of on-going efforts of Sri Lankan civil society and international actors based on UN recommendations regarding disappearances is starting to be seen now. The government this month has appointed a special Deputy Inspector General (DIG) on Disappearances for Trincomalee; and he is of Tamil ethnicity.

Strengthening Community-Based Structures and Collaborative Networks

NPSL staff presence is sometimes called upon to contribute to the safety of other humanitarian workers as they do their work in vulnerable areas. NPSL also helps build the capacity of small, local groups by opening up space for them to gather in a more secure environment and helping them access resources available through larger organizations or other networks. These slow, relationship-building activities help build the confidence of local peace-minded actors to take more pro-active roles in solving community problems and reducing the likelihood of violence across ethnic and religious divides.

In Batti District, given the violence that has spiked a number of times in 2008, groundwork has been laid for the January launch of a UNDP-funded Dialogue project to help the teams further build the capacity of their established networks in both the northern and the southern parts of the district to be able to address community problems nonviolently. The project is a six-month pilot to engage in a 'democratic dialoguing' process with grassroots Tamil and Muslim stakeholders in vulnerable communities, and is a combined initiative including NPSL, Sarvodaya, and the Foundation for Co-existence. A Training of Trainers will begin the process and then trained community workers will return to their communities, with the on-going support of the NP teams, to engage in dialoguing exercises at the grassroots level on community problems they identify. The fragility of community level connections between Muslim and Tamil communities has hampered peaceful resolution of community tensions before. It is expected that this effort will build these connections outside of a crisis period, so that they can be called upon if and when needed.

In Trinco District the team has also been laying the groundwork for a series of December and January activities that will further support and build the capacity of the Peace Committees that the team has long been associated with. Consultation meetings were held with more than 17 Peace Committees in six divisions, and 12

Peace Committee projects were identified for bringing the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities together around shared community activities. This initiative is funded by our supporters in Japan through the Niwano Foundation and with the support of NP-Japan. As in Batticaloa district, the lack of dependable connections between ethnic communities allows rumors and fears to spread in times of crisis. These projects will continue the strengthening of shared networks.

The Jaffna and Colombo Response Teams continue to collaborate on improving the safety network for human rights defenders (HRDs) and other vulnerable civilians.

The situation in Sri Lanka is fast changing – and NPSL is working to find new ways to support and build local structures that help Sri Lankans to feel safer and more confident and to offer presence and support in vulnerable communities, help provide protection to individuals whose lives have been threatened, and to support children and families when their lives have become caught up in the cycles of violence and war.

Rita Webb, Programme Officer
Ellen Furnari, Acting Grants Officer



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.

Rita Webb, Programme Officer