



## வடகிழக்கு மனித உரிமைகள் செயலகம்

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#### **The displaced in Vanni – June 2008**

The impact of displacement on the lives of the families is not as visually shocking, yet the devastation is deep and long term. The food production of the community that sustained the families is no more. The medical personnel and facilities that the families sought for help are no more. The education system that educated the children of the families is no more. The leisure activities for the community are no more. The familiar cozy surroundings of the homes are no more. The list of no-mores is endless. Such displacement within the Tamil community has a very long history that dates back to 1958 when the very first displacement took place following the very first pogrom against the Tamil people. At the time, Tamil people living in Colombo were literally shipped to Jaffna and other parts of the Tamil homeland.

In the current context, displacement within Tamil community is being viewed as those that occurred prior to the 2002 ceasefire (CFA) and those that occurred since. This view highlights the fact that the pre CFA displaced continue to remain displaced even now. There are two main causes for this. Fear of moving back to parts of Sri Lankan Government controlled areas that are isolated from the international media - for example areas like Jaffna - is one cause. The confiscation of private property of the people in the name of High Security Zone is the second major cause for the pre-CFA displaced remaining displaced even now.

The post-CFA displacement is also entirely a movement away from areas that are isolated from the international media. This involves Sri Lankan Government controlled areas like Jaffna as well as areas of direct clashes between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. This report is about the displacement within the LTTE areas of Vanni and thus about the displacement caused by clashes between the two parties.

The post-CFA displacement has a common thread. As has happened in the east during 2006, part of the military strategy is to first displace the people by targeted shelling before launching large scale offensives. This invariably results in people displacing multiple times because people have a desire to displace to locations that are closer to their own homes. The causes of displacement within the Tamil community are such that almost always they have taken place on a mass scale leaving no one behind. This means

schools and other large buildings in the deserted villages become overgrown with weeds and in due course become dilapidated. This has become the case with villages near FDLs in Vanni over the last two years.

The map shows the movement of the displaced within Vanni since direct clashes began in 2006. The map shows four areas of displacement in four colors that are caused by the Sri Lankan military stationed in four different parts. Displacement from the red area is caused by the shelling from the Jaffna camps; those in the blue area is caused by the camps in Mannar, those in the yellow area is caused by the camps in Vavuniya and those in the green area is caused by the camps in Manalaru. The statistics on this displacement is given in the table below.



**Displacement pattern in Vanni  
since 2002 Ceasefire**

AGA Division	No of displaced persons	No of displaced students	No of displaced schools	Cultivation abandoned (HA)	Livestock abandoned	Killed by SLA attacks	Injured by SLA attacks
Poonahari	11850	4142	22	3640	unknown	15	17
Pachchilaipalli	10140	1667	8	850	unknown	20	26
Vadamar- east	7671	1124	12	small scale	unknown	2	7
Maritimepattu	5000	909	5	2657	1176	7	83
Oddusuddan	500	0	0	15		22	6
Musali	4000	1177	8	1260	2315	19	2
Manthai west	22100	3318	12	3656	9910	25	64
Madu	7300	2430	12	729	2745	43	37
Manthai east	7400	2158	14	793	1620	0	0
Vav-North	7554	1056	15	7030	5901	15	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>83515</b>	<b>17981</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>20630</b>	<b>23667</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>256</b>

The statistics on displacement can never convey the full impact of such en-mass displacement on the broken social networks, destroyed interdependent rural economy, lost livelihoods and destitution, deterioration of cultural norms, loss of education and other child rights to mention a few. The full impact of displacement on a community can only be gained by knowing the pre-displaced community and their social setup and standard of living. As far as the Sri Lankan Tamils displaced within the island are concerned the impact on social fabric has been huge.

There are 108 schools in the Vanni area that has displaced in this period. Many of these schools combine with a school that is still functioning in its own building. This results in acute shortage of all kinds of material needed for running a school. Due to problems with transportation and poverty, many students who displace end up not attending school.

The poor nutritional level of children living in Vanni which has been reported by UNICEF and other international agencies is an indication of the poverty induced by repeated displacement and broken social fabric. Another indicator of the impact of displacement is the memories of the older generation who recount their lost way of life with a deep longing. Within the Tamil community a full generation has grown up as internally displaced who have never been to their parents own homes even if it is less than 50 kilometers away. People from regions like Kokkilai-Manaluru region in Mullaithivu, Mayiliddy in Jaffna displaced in the 80's and remain displaced.

Among the past displaced as well as the newly displaced Tamil community, the stories told by families are heart breaking. Many would have lost productive family members due to the fighting. There will be those severely impaired due to the fighting. The condition of the women folk, their physique and health tells the story of destitution caused by loss of productive family members.

Parish priest for Manthai west said, *“People in my Parish began displacing from Adampan and the adjoining areas from the beginning of 2007 and continued to displace throughout 2007. Displacement did not bring any relief from the fear of shelling. The same people continued displace further and have arrived in Thevanpidy. The tragedy is that even the shrine of the famous Madhu church was forced to displace to Thevanpidy. Soon after the shrine displaced to Thevanpidy many worshippers came here. But due to frequent claymore attacks even the number of people coming to worship the shrine has dropped.*

*All of the displaced are languishing without a livelihood and are dependent on the daily relief. When they do not receive this daily relief they can be seen just lying down under trees in hunger. We do not have the resources to help them. We give to people who come to us. We are unable to do more. I can see how these people are affected psychologically by their plight.”*

Despite all this, twenty five years of repeated displacement has taught the Tamil people to manage it and survive it. The displaced are unusually calm, organized and tidy. This tradition has masked the true devastation from the outside eye.



Michael Daniel from Mannar said, *“I am a farmer. People from my village started to displace from August 2007 because of the constant shelling by the Sri Lanka military. I had cultivated 4 acres of rice fields and planted 2 acres of vegetable plots. I waited till I harvested them because I need to repay the loans taken for these cultivations. One man was killed in the next village and after that I gave up everything and displaced. First we just stayed under a tree. Then my wife got a job as pre-school teacher for Rs1500/= per month. That was not enough for living. Also another man known to me was killed in a claymore attack as he was bringing fish for sale. So we displaced again. We had to struggle pay Rs 2000/= to the tractor to transport our belongings. What are we going to do to educate my four children? This is not the first time we have displaced. Since 1985 we have displaced to Madhu every three years or so”.*



Thirumal Ramakrishnan said *“I am from Jaffna. In 1995 four of us, me, wife and two children, displaced with a suitcase in hand. Our youngest was a baby then. We stayed in many places and ended up in Mankulam. Then when Jeyasikuri offensive started we went to Mallavi. Then we went to Mannar and I was working as a tractor driver. We lived in someone else’s land and we were rearing 8 cows and 15 goats. We also had a vegetable plot at home. Last year in September we started displacing again due to shelling, first to Madhu, then to Aththomoddai and now here in Nahapaduvan. Children cannot go to school now”.*



Unfortunately, the trend of displacement and resulting misery of homelessness for the thousands is going to get worse, testing the resolve of the people.