



# Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## VANNI SITUATION REPORT & APPEAL

### Humanitarian Situation Resulting from the Sri Lanka military offensive:

The Government of Sri Lanka's land, air, and naval military operations over the past year have created a humanitarian crisis unprecedented in the history of the 25-year conflict. This crisis has gone largely unreported in the international media due to the fact that the government has banned the media from the Vanni (LTTE controlled area) and ordered the United Nations (UN) and international NGOs out of the area in September 2008. This military offensive has resulted in over 362,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Some of these civilians have been displaced repeatedly, some up to 10 times.

In 2008 the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) unilaterally withdrew from the Cease Fire Agreement that it had entered into with the LTTE in 2002, and embarked upon the current military offensive. It is the civilians who have been most severely affected by this return to war.

In the Vanni alone thus far, the bombing and shelling by the GoSL military forces over the past year has killed 352 civilians. Most of these civilians have been babies, young children, school students and women.

Overall, 2632 civilians have been confirmed killed and more than 6700 injured over the past 2 years in the NorthEast as a result of military actions by the GoSL. Additionally, over 6,000 people have been disappeared or extra-judicially killed by GoSL forces or paramilitaries affiliated to the government.

As a result of kfir jet bombings and Sri Lanka Army artillery attacks over the past month 70 displaced people have been killed and 152 people injured.

### Displacement & Suffering:

Puthkudiyiruppu, Viswamadu, Tharmapuram & Mullaitivu	400 Sq. Km
Total population	380,000 – 400,000
Total displaced (displaced)	362,000

As a result of indiscriminate bombing by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) artillery civilians living in the 4 districts of the Vanni have been squeezed into an ever-shrinking area that is secured by the LTTE. Faced with multiple displacements, approximately 400,000 civilians (362,000 IDPs) to an area of about 400 square kilometres. The situation is dire due to GoSL imposed restrictions and embargoes on humanitarian assistance and the ordered departure of the UN and international NGOs. The IDPs lack adequate levels of the basic needs required to sustain life: food, water, shelter, toilets and/or medical facilities. Not only has the GoSL blocked and restricted these humanitarian items, it has also closed down the supply routes increasing the levels of starvation and disease.

Targeted bombing and shelling by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and Air Force (SLAF) of schools, places of worship, civilian settlements and other places where people gather has caused people "spread out" and seek refuge in the jungles. Already flooded by the recent monsoon rains these most of the areas that are being used are infested with malarial mosquitoes and venomous snakes posing threat of diseases.



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## Food Supply:

Almost all of the agricultural land in the Vanni has all been militarised due to the ongoing invasion by the GoSL military resulting in agriculture and animal husbandry in the Vanni being almost completely stopped. The Sri Lanka Navy also prohibits fishing for coastal fishermen. Attempts by the World Food Programme (WFP) to supply food to the displaced people via weekly convoys have been thwarted by the government forces' pre-meditated attacks on the supply convoys and convoy routes. This results in delays and cancellations of the convoys. The GoSL, in contravention of the Geneva Convention, is using food and medicine as a weapon of war. The GoSL is attempting to drive the civilians out of the Vanni with the aim of ethically cleansing the area and committing genocide against the Tamil people.

A report by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) dated 15 January 2009 states that there has been no food supply for the past week. At present 360,000 to 400,000 people are in the brutal grip the GoSL' military invasion, not knowing what to do or where to run, and faced with the grim fact that provisions have already run out and the supply routes have been completely cut off by the government.

## Health:

Total population	380,000 – 400,000
Hospitals functioning (temporary)	02
Hospitals functioning (permanent)	01
Hospitals closed	15
Nurses serving	30 - 40
Beds in hospitals (including temporary)	250 – 300
Intensive care unit (running)	01

All hospitals in the Vanni have been forced to curtail their services due aerial bombing and artillery attacks by the GoSL military that have targeted hospitals. More than 10 hospitals have ceased functioning. The two major hospitals, Kilinochchi General Hospital and Mullaitivu General Hospital have been displaced and are functioning in school buildings in Visuvamadu and Udayarkaddu.

These hospitals and the hospitals that were located in Puthukkudyirupu and Visuwamadu have come under frequent targeted attacks by SLAF bombing and SLA artillery; as a result people are scared to seek assistance for medical treatments. All hospital resources are fully mobilised and stretched to their limits but continue to provide treatment and services to the injured and sick, whose numbers keep on increasing. Unless replenished soon this service will also come to a standstill soon.

There are only 10 doctors, 40 nurses and 300 temporary beds to serve the needs of 400,000 people. Over the last 12 months the GoSL has not sent the full quarterly quota of medicine and medical supplies to the Vanni. UN situation reports have confirmed that only 50% of the required amounts were sent at times.

Approximately 700 times a month ambulances carrying seriously ill civilian patients from the Vanni regularly crossed into government-controlled areas with the assistance of the ICRC so that the patients could receive medical treatment not available in the Vanni. Such patients are now not allowed to cross the border due to GoSL actions and numerous patients have died while waiting to cross to the government controlled areas. The number of patients requiring urgent medical treatment continues to increase due to military offensives by the government forces.

## Travel across borders:

Civilians used to cross the border between the LTTE and government controlled areas at the rate of about 4000-5000 persons per day, of these approximately 20-30 were patients transported in ambulances.



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Approximately 300 vehicles also crossed over daily prior to the government restrictions. This kind of travel across the border is not allowed by the government any more.

## **Public Services:**

Public transport, telecommunication, the banking sector, schools, food distribution centres, and trading establishments have all been rendered dysfunctional due to the ongoing military offensive by the government forces.

## **Relief Work:**

On 05 September 2008 the Sri Lanka government ordered all international NGOs and United Nations Agencies in the Vanni to leave the area. ICRC was allowed to remain with severe restrictions on its activities and its ability to make public statements about the current humanitarian conditions placed on it by the GoSL. Consequently, more than 15 international NGOs (INGOs) left the area and discontinued their services to Vanni people. Following the exodus of organisations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, CARE, Oxfam and Save the Children the urgent needs of the displaced people such as education, water and sanitation, nutrition and livelihoods have been severely disrupted.

Displaced people in the Vanni received the one off shipment of non-food relief items (NFRIs) sent by the people of Tamil Nadu, India in November 2008. Since then they have received no other shipments of NFRIs. Thus far only 5600 temporary shelters have been were constructed due to GoSL restrictions on the transportation of shelter materials, tents, and tarpaulins. This is only 10% of the actual needs.

## **Activities of Local Organisations:**

TRO, Socio-Economic Development Organisation of Tamils (SEDOT), some religious organisations, approximately 20 other local NGOs and community based organizations (CBOs) have mobilized all the resources at their disposal are engaged in providing essential humanitarian services to the displaced people.

## **APPEAL:**

TRO requests that the Government of India, President-Elect Obama, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the International Community pressure the Government of Sri Lanka to:

- 1. Cease all bombing and shelling of civilians and civilian institutions such as hospitals, schools, temples, churches and civil administration buildings;**
- 2. Declare, in consultation with the LTTE and the ICRC, "safe zones/havens" for IDPs and other civilians;**
- 3. Allow UN & international NGOs to enter the Vanni and remain there to assist civilian IDPs;**
- 4. Open the border checkpoints so that ambulances can transport the severely wounded civilians to hospitals;**
- 5. Allow the unfettered transportation of humanitarian relief to the Vanni. This includes: food, medicine, shelter materials (tents, tarpaulins, etc), fuel, and other essential items.**