

# Ground Realities: challenges faced by humanitarian actors

**Rev. Fr. Jeyakumar**

Director, HUDEC-CARITAS Jaffna

## Introduction

The cost of the war especially internal conflict is incalculable. The economic loss caused by war is only the surface of the enormous human suffering and waste that lie beneath. The latter cannot be priced. It tends to violate the social norms and human bonds that have held the communities together. It tears apart the moral fabric of a society. The cost of the internal war in Srilanka especially in the north and east encompasses these entire losses-economic, human socio-political and moral.

The Hudec Caritas-Jaffna is the Social action arm of catholic church of Jaffna, which covers three administrative districts, Jaffna, Mullaithivu and Kilinocochi and the latter two districts are known as Vanni area which is administrated by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eealam and the Jaffna district is administrated by the Govt.of S.L . With the closure of A9 road which was the only land route that was connecting the peninsula to all the other districts is now completely isolated from all the administrative activities of the government. Due to the A9 closure the Jaffna peninsula is severely lacking in Socio economic cultural and human development.

The Jaffna Peninsula has a population of 653, 755 people and consists of 188, 236 families and among these 125,456 families are living under poverty. Under the poverty alleviation program of the Govt.of SL, popularly known as ‘the Samurthi’ 53,000 families are benefiting in the Jaffna district.

## Socio-political concern

The war has wider socio-political consequences. It has meant the loss of the sense of security and the freedom of movement intrinsic to a sense of social well being that people must enjoy in their normal lives. In the peninsula the population has been unable to enjoy their democratic rights. Fear, death threats, insecurity and ever present threat of violence at any time and place pervade the lives of ordinary citizens. One of the major problems the people in the peninsula facing is the abduction (the phenomena of white vans) missing and extrajudicial killings. The below given data indicates the fear psychosis and the paranoia generated among the people. The number of surrenders to the Human Rights Commission is increasing and it is due to the fact of the fear of death. Subsequently all the surrenders are sent to the prison for safety. 79 people have already surrendered and they are in the prison. A pervasive sense of insecurity has become a part of life for the entire population. The fear of death is ever present.

Summary

2006

	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Total</b>
Death	45	63	44	40	23	<b>215</b>

Missing	68	52	30	15	22	<b>187</b>
---------	----	----	----	----	----	------------

2007

	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Total</b>
Deaths	28	18	34	17	11	19	18	24	<b>127</b>
Missing	33	36	44	25	16	17	12	23	<b>183</b>

This phenomenon of disappearance etc has enormous social and cultural impact on the family and society at large. Increase in the number of orphans and widows are an indicator of this impact. Most of the victims are young fathers belonging to lower class sector of the society. The young widow begins to experience the economic burden. Besides she feels that she is not socially acceptable because of her early widowhood. People tend to regard her as an omen of misfortune. (see annexure 1)

No civil society organizations are raising voice against such human right violations due to the fear of death. Public demonstrations or civil protests are not practiced due to fear of abductions or killings. Continuous curfew in the nights for more than a year is another form of human right violation which deprives the cultural and social interaction of the people. Introduction of new security measures such as registration of families, issuing of special identity cards and fishermen identity cards are causing harassments to the people. The three wheeler owners are asked to take their identity cards. A person is expected to carry many identity cards and losing one will certainly cause fear. Affiliation to any political party is the right of any person in a democratic country and one need not reveal his/her affiliation. On the contrary citizens are asked to reveal their affiliation. (See annexure 2 & 3)

### **Livelihood**

During the last decade there has been a serious drop in employment opportunities in the district due to most of the potential entrepreneur especially outside the district showing less interest in investing their capital left due to the damages caused to their factories. Besides the traditional income earning opportunities are very much limited due to various restrictions imposed.

#### **a) Fisheries**

There are about 18000 fishing families engaged in this sector and most of them are used only to this industry. Due to rigid restrictions in time and area and allowing a limited number of fishermen in rotation not exceeding two kilometers have affected the production of this industry. Their earning capacity is limited and the families have lost their livelihood. The government has not sufficiently compensated. The families who are closely associated with fishing industries are also affected.

#### **b) Agriculture**

Due to the closure of A9 road few farmers show a keen interest in cultivating subsidy crops as the prices are low. The agriculture inputs are bought and sold at high prices and the required input items for farming reaches very late and above all the market facilities are not available. Despite the fact some of the NGOs encouraged the farmers to cultivate

by supporting financial and they sustained losses. Number of families engaged in this industry is 65,000 and it is not only the farmers are affected but also the consumers too.

**c) Small industries and trade**

Forty thousand families are engaged in this sector. Once again this sector is also come to a stand still due to the A9 closure. Most of the inputs for this industry are brought from the south. Scarcity of these items and the high transport cost created less interest among many industrialists. Shortage of building materials and high cost of transport created unemployment and underemployment. Before August 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, one hundred and fifty lorry loads of things were brought in and out daily. The only transport available no is for both the people and traders are the ships and the limited local flights.

**d) Governmental and non governmental sector**

Though a small percentage of the population involved in this sector yet they also face difficulties due to the adverse impact of the above mentioned industries. Besides all the food items, fuel, building materials are brought by the ships and as a result of it person in the peninsula pays 3-4 time more for the food compare to the people in the rest of the country. Continuous appeals are made by some civil societies to the government to bear the extra cost of the transport up to now no positive steps are taken.

**Internally Displaced People (IDPs)**

Internally Displaced persons in the peninsula fall into two main categories. The first category belongs to people who were driven form the ‘high security zones’. Most of them have almost lived in camps over two decades. The total number of IDP families are 30,274. Among these displaced people some have either left the country or settled in other parts of Srilanka. The second category of IDPs left their traditional areas due to fear of deaths especially after the recent escalation of violence in August 2006. Number of families displaced after August 11<sup>th</sup> is 8873 families and it consists of 33,303 persons. This data does not deal with the persons who have sought refuge in other countries.

	<i>In Welfare Camps</i>		<i>With Relatives / Friends</i>		<i>In Temporary Shelters</i>		<i>Total Refugees</i>	
	<i>Family</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Members</i>
<i>Before on 11.08.2006</i>	2611	10177	18790	65666			21401	75846
<i>After on 11.08.2006</i>	443	1797	8430	31506			8873	33303
<i>Tsunami</i>					3060	11250	3060	11250
<i>Total Refugees</i>	3054	11974	27220	97172	3060	11250	3334	120336

This displacement figures are taken from the Jaffna Secretariat on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007.

The human loss caused by displacements is immense. Families are uprooted from the community of relatives, friends and neighbors with whom they have grown up. The social and economic well being acquired through a lifetime's effort is destroyed in one day. They are compelled to find new means of livelihood. Those who are in the camps cannot enjoy the space and privacy of a home. Needs such as water and sanitation are limited. These have enormous impact on the children whose education is interrupted. Even when they temporally settled the process of adjustment is often painful. Most of them relate to new neighbors and face hostility and resentment as outsiders. It observed that the displaced people loose a sense of belongingness and hope for the future. This type of attitude has an adverse impact in all spheres of their future life.