

SRI LANKA: DISPLACED PERSONS

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The end of 1995 and beginning of 1996 saw an intensification of the fighting between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with the capture of Jaffna by the army precipitating a car bomb blast in Colombo on 31 January which killed 90 people and injured 1,400 others. Despite this deteriorating situation in the war zones of the north and east of the country, operations to assist displaced persons run by the International Federation and Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) in non-conflict areas continued successfully. The ongoing violence, however, bodes ill for any chance of a speedy resolution to the 13-year civil war, making it imperative that donors continue their support throughout 1996 for 51,000 displaced people in 220 camps and another 20,000 local people.

The context

Although last year began with great hope, following the 8 January agreement between the government and the LTTE, intense fighting resumed again in April and continued throughout the rest of 1995 with reports of thousands of combat casualties in the north and east. During the latter part of the year, the government launched a major military offensive which in early December led to the capture of Jaffna town and large areas of the Jaffna Peninsula. The fighting resulted in an exodus of civilians from Jaffna town towards areas just south of the peninsula, i.e., Vanni region in Kilinochi and Mulative districts. During December, an estimated 200-300,000 newly displaced (Tamils) arrived in these areas and temporarily settled with relatives, in schools or in temporary huts.

Throughout 1995 the Federation was not directly involved in activities in the conflict areas in the north and east, but it did continue to support the SLRCS's role as the most important provider of temporary shelter materials and mobile health services for IDPs in the non-conflict areas. The SLRCS/Federation relief operation is currently assisting 51,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have fled the fighting over the past five years and are living in 220 government-recognised camps and welfare centres in non-conflict areas.

Latest events

Thousands of civilians in eastern and northern parts of the island are living in continual fear of air strikes, regular ground combat, revenge killings and arrests. The extremely dangerous situation at the moment was highlighted by the suicide bomb attack on the Central Bank in Colombo on 31 January, which killed 90 civilians and wounded 1,400 people, and the subsequent revenge killing of 30 civilians in a village in east Sri Lanka.

There seems to be little hope of a peaceful settlement soon of the 13-year civil war, although the government is in the process of presenting a political package based on a complicated plan of giving political autonomy to a new, predominantly Tamil, state in the north and east of the country.

The military offensive in the last five months has had only limited influence on the number of new IDPs in the western and central part of Sri Lanka. The majority of newly displaced remain resident in areas under LTTE control, with only a few hundred families arriving in areas within the Federation-supported SLRCS programme. Meanwhile, families continue to be relocated into semi-permanent settlements, thereby reducing the case load at the same time. Official IDP figures issued by the Sri Lankan Government as of 31 December 1995 are as follows:

- Total number of IDP camps/welfare centres in the country 552
- Total number of IDPs living in camps/welfare centres in the country 169,445
- Total number of IDPs in the country 912,887

The ICRC continues to be present in the north and east, providing protection for government food supplies to LTTE-controlled areas and supervising mobile health teams operating in the same areas. ICRC reports severe difficulties in providing medical supplies to those teams.

Meanwhile, the SLRCS and the Federation are discussing closer co-ordination of shelter and health programmes — especially in Puttalam — with the Ministry of Rehabilitation, which is responsible for IDPs and welfare centres,.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The tables below show the SLRCS/Federation's achievements in 1995 in relation to the distribution of relief commodities and number of persons benefiting from the five mobile health teams. More than 1.2 million re-roofing units (cadjans) were distributed, at least 120,000 patients treated and 50,000 IDPs given vital and on-going preventive health care education. In addition, income generating projects were completed, 25 double latrines and seven wells constructed, recreational materials distributed to all centres and dry rations to the Colombo and Gampaha districts.

The Red Cross relief operation, with its provision of regular, routine assistance will continue as long as the government and other agencies are not able to respond. In 1996, the Federation is providing the following basic relief services:

- ***Shelter distribution;*** The provision of 1,665,000 pairs of cadjans for the annual re-roofing of 8,000 camp huts and 58,300 poles of different specifications for the annual structural repairs of 4,200 huts. Shelter activities in Puttalam are under review and awaiting an initiative from the Ministry of Rehabilitation.
- ***Mobile health services;*** Health services provided by five mobile health teams will be continued.
- ***Monthly food distributions;*** The supply of food packages to selected IDP camps and welfare centres in Colombo and Gampaha is currently suspended, since the above needs are covered by the Sri Lankan government and WFP.

Shelter Distributions in 1995 •

District	No. of Beneficiaries	Re-roofing units Distributed	Poles Distributed	Food Covers Distributed
Puttalam	18,168	553,710	51,176	6,523
Anuradhapura	12,945	436,100	17,075	2,150
Polonnaruwa	4,487	161,325	0	1,025
Kurunegala	2,326	55,800	2,849	513
Matale	259	0	0	45
Gampaha	126	400	0	214
Colombo	400	5,050	312	30
Total	38,711	1,212,385	71,412	10,500

Mobile Health Services (Total Beneficiaries) •

	July	August	September	October	November	December
Camps/Welfare Centres	54,541	56,525	48,903	52,815	55,421	59,538
Adjoining Villages	25,981	26,181	26,181	20,871	24,489	20,897
Grand Total	80,522	82,706	75,084	73,686	79,910	80,435

Co-ordination: SLRCS / Federation

Due to the institutional crisis that engulfed the SLRCS it became evident during 1995 that the programme had to be simplified and implemented jointly, with an increased level of involvement from the Federation delegation. By the end of 1995, all activities except mobile health services and shelter distributions had been stopped, either as a result of a needs review or as an acknowledgement of capacity limitations of the SLRCS. A planned Development Appeal, which was due to be launched in July 1995 to attract funding support for re-establishing the Society's foundation and capacity, was cancelled in August because of the overall instability.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the SLRCS and the Federation to formalise operational responsibilities was signed in mid-1995. But this was replaced by a new Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties in December 1995. The SLRCS has been focusing its energy in the last three to six months on creating stability at headquarters and beginning the process of self-assessment. Between late 1995 and early 1996 the National Society presented its *Two-Year Master Plan* and *Plan of Action for 1996* which will be implemented without external assistance.

Six months after the completion of the action plan, a review should be held jointly by the Federation and certain sister Societies in co-operation with the SLRCS to assess the implementation of the plan. The Federation will consider extending development co-operation to the SLRCS, provided the above review concludes that real improvement has been affected in the management of the SLRCS through the implementation of the plan of action.

Presently, some 45 SLRCS contracted programme (relief and health) staff are working in the field or at the SLRCS national headquarters. The shelter programme alone employed up to 15 SLRCS contracted officers/support staff and four local staff of the Federation delegation during 1995. This delegation continues to provide advice and consultations with the new leadership, while the relief operation is used as a 'profile builder' and a provider of human resources for key sections within the national headquarters.

The Federation delegation in Colombo was manned by three delegates (Head of Delegation, Relief delegate and Finance delegate) and 12 experienced local staff members in 1995, and it played an important role in assisting the National Society with planning, procurement, monitoring, supervising and reporting.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The delegation continues to promote and support appropriate representation and co-ordination of the relief programme and the Red Cross in general in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the SLRCS continues to be part of a locally-established NGO Consortium which aims to co-ordinate centrally the relief and rehabilitation activities of local and international NGOs and humanitarian organisations, the government, plus UN and international agencies. It is nevertheless important for the SLRCS and the delegation to develop and maintain direct contacts with relevant authorities within the government. The direct sharing of information with UNHCR and ICRC is also maintained.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The Federation will continue to assist the SLRCS to regain its integrity and build up its foundation, and thereby its capacity and performance. While supporting a careful and long- term change process within the SLRCS, the Federation will be obliged to continue its core programme of health care and shelter to IDPs in the western and central parts of Sri Lanka, out of the international media spotlight. Yet these operations could still increase if the situation in the north and east deteriorates further, resulting in a dramatic increase of IDPs into more stable zones under full government control.

Donors are thanked for their contributions to the assistance programme for displaced persons in Sri Lanka. The Federation urges them to continue supporting its efforts to surmount current difficulties by rapidly responding with additional funding to maintain existing services and meet outstanding priority needs.

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