

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

SRI LANKA: CIVILIAN DISPLACEMENT

08 May 2006

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 183 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 01/2006) is being issued for information only, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The Situation

Since mid-April there has been an escalation in the number of killings and violent incidents reported from the north and east of Sri Lanka, particularly in Trincomalee district. This latest upsurge in violence appears to have been triggered by the killing of a prominent Tamil activist in Trincomalee on 7 April. In the subsequent weeks a spate of claymore mine explosions, mostly targeting military convoys, road patrols or checkpoints as well as shooting and grenade explosions in the north and east have claimed the lives of a number of military personnel and cadres of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Casualties have also included civilians. One grenade explosion that killed five people in a Trincomalee vegetable market sparked off retaliatory mob attacks on Tamil business premises and homes, prompting the government to impose a curfew to reduce tensions and prevent a further escalation of ethnic violence. Night-time curfew continued for several days.

On 26 April the situation worsened following a suicide bombing in Colombo targeting the army commander. Widely thought to be orchestrated by the LTTE, the suicide bombing killed 11 people and injured 26 others including the commander. Hours after the attack the air force launched targeted air strikes on LTTE positions on the outskirts of Trincomalee district, supported by heavy weapon fire from the army and navy. According to news

reports, at least one air force missile hit a jetty in government-controlled areas, injuring civilians and navy personnel. The LTTE alleged that 12 civilians were killed in the air strikes.

Initial reports from government officials and others in the Trincomalee area spoke of at least 40,000 people being displaced by the violence and air strikes, most of whom have sought refuge in LTTE-controlled areas of the district. According to information gathered by the UN and other NGOs on 2 May, this figure is closer to 6,360 families or 22,000 people. Gathering accurate information has been problematic due to the fluidity of population movements and restrictions that aid agencies have faced in accessing areas where the IDP's are located.

Clashes between the mainstream LTTE and its breakaway Karuna faction have also been reported. The Karuna faction recently called off a unilateral ceasefire that had been declared with the mainstream LTTE. This is seen as setting the stage for more violence across the north and east. On 7 May there were artillery and mortar exchanges between the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and the mainstream LTTE in areas surrounding Batticaloa. On the same day 12 police officers were injured in a hand grenade attack that took place in front of Batticaloa police head office.

In Jaffna, civilian-based organizations have declared an indefinite work stoppage following the abduction and killing of eight youths in Jaffna on 6 May. In an effort aimed at maintaining civil order, SLA imposed a curfew in Jaffna district from 12 midnight Sunday to 4 pm Monday, 8 May.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Since the escalation in violence the majority of international staff of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation) and its member national societies working in Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts have been temporarily redeployed to Colombo. Due to the difficult operating environment freedom of movement for programme staff has been severely restricted in many places. This has led to a temporary suspension of most post-tsunami recovery programmes in these districts. The Red Cross and Red Crescent is concerned that the suspension of activities poses a direct threat to the welfare of vulnerable communities currently supported under these programmes. National project staff together with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) will continue to implement and monitor projects where possible and a resumption of activities will depend on the security situation which is being reviewed daily.

The permanent presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and SLRCS in the north and northeast remains unchanged. The ICRC and SLRCS together with other agencies and NGO have been involved in assessments of the humanitarian situation since the new movement of people commenced last month. These families are now living in schools and places of religious worship. Some are staying with relatives while others are scattered in parts of the jungle.

The Red Cross has focused on assisting with initial assessments, provision of non-food relief items (NFRI) and hygiene kits, assistance in transporting some of the injured to hospitals and provision of health services such as running mobile clinics.

Early assessments by the SLRCS Trincomalee branch identified a need for food packs, dry rations, mosquito coils, mats, bed sheets, kitchen utensils, baby packs, clothes, jerry cans for water storage, milk powder, tents, water and sanitation and hygiene kits. Hygiene packs and together with other items were distributed on 15 April by SLRCS to 150 families residing in two camps (Anpuvalipuram and Varothyanagar) in Trincomalee. It included soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, baby kits, mosquito coils, baby milk powder, baby biscuits and jerry cans. By 25 April, 334 families had been provided with hygiene kits, sleeping mats, bed sheets, mosquito coils, kitchen sets, milk powder and other food items. These stocks were provided from limited buffer stocks maintained in Trincomalee by SLRCS, ICRC, Japanese Red Cross and the Federation.

ICRC protection teams accompanied an ambulance carrying two injured persons to the Batticaloa hospital and are concentrating on core areas of intervention that include access to IDPs and protection work. Meanwhile, SLRCS volunteers and staff have been providing health care services to the displaced in all areas except in Kappalthurai.

The stocks of NFRI in the Trincomalee branch have now been replenished from buffer stocks maintained at the Red Cross regional warehouse in Ampara. The additional stocks of NFRI sent from Ampara are sufficient for around 1,000 families. They include:

Item	Quantity in units
Hygiene Kits	1,000
Kitchen Sets	1,000
Bed Sheets	1,000
Sleeping Mats	1,000
Water Jerry Cans (20L)	500
Hurricane Lamps	1,000
Laundry Soap	1,000
Body Soap	1,000
<i>Sarongs</i> (men's clothing)	1,000
<i>Sarees</i> (women's clothing)	1,000

Coordination

The Red Cross has been coordinating its response with government institutions, international and local NGOs – all of whom have been responding to various needs of the displaced populations.

A Federation/Hong Kong branch of the Red Cross Society of China disaster management delegate has now been deployed in Trincomalee district to provide support to the branch and help coordinate the response with ICRC.

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