



Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VANNI SITUATION REPORT

Displacement continues from areas south of Mullaitivu and East of Kilinochchi due to ongoing military offensives by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. These displaced include internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been displaced from other parts of the Vanni, some up to ten times and new IDPs who had been living in the villages where fighting is taking place. The population of the Vanni is approximately 450,000 persons. Currently, 350,000 of these persons are displaced.

The food situation in the Vanni is especially critical for a variety of reasons:

1. According to Government Agents (GAs) of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts the internally displaced persons (IDP) population is 350,000 but the figure used by the World Food Program (WFP) to determine the amount of food sent via its convoys is 230,000. As discussed in the previous situation report *TRO Situation Report November and December (31/12/08)* the UN/WFP is not even transporting enough food for 230,000 persons they recognize as existing - there is a 63% shortfall in the amount of food transported by WFP in its convoys and what is needed for an IDP population of that size if the WFP's own guideline of 0.5 kgs per person per day is applied. This shortfall rises to 76% if the GA's figure of 350,000 IDPs is used.
2. In essence, when food is brought from Colombo by the WFP convoys and distributed to the IDP population only 1/3 of the days in a month are covered. For example, in November 2008 according to Kachcheri (AGA office) sources only 11.5 days worth of dry rations were provided to the IDP population in the Mullaitivu District.
3. Convoys and convoy routes are shelled or become impassable due to the monsoon rains leading to delays in convoy arrivals and reducing the frequency of the convoys. As a result the food quantity necessary for the month does not arrive in the Vanni.
4. Due to the absence of international NGOs and UN Agencies in the Vanni, as a result of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) ordering them to leave in September 2008, and the restrictions on humanitarian access imposed by the GoSL there has been a lack of contingency planning and emergency preparedness on the part of relevant sectors.
5. There are no buffer stocks of food or food production items due to restrictions and embargoes imposed by the GoSL. Necessary items such as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides were not transported in time resulting in severe shortages.
6. Food Production:
 - a. Most of the cultivable lands and irrigation systems have been occupied by the Sri Lanka armed forces resulting in reduced production of rice and fresh vegetables to supplement the dry rations.
 - b. The Vanni was self sufficient in rice production prior to the military offensive by the GoSL and the reduction in the amount of farm land in production will have lasting effects over the next 12 months.
 - c. Farmers were displaced from their farmland before they could harvest their crops.
 - d. Shelling and bombing have caused those farmers who could access their fields to stay at home.



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- e. Floodwaters from the monsoon rains and Cyclone Nisha have destroyed the majority of the remaining crops.
 - f. The unusually heavy monsoon rains and lack of maintenance of water reservoirs and canals due to the war have resulted in most of the water being wasted or contaminated.
 - g. Only a very small area is available for cultivation now. In these areas all the cattle, goats, and water buffalos must be accommodated. They roam in search of food because there are not sufficient grasslands remaining to sustain them.
 - h. Each IDP shelter and settlement needs to be fenced in order to prevent these animals from destroying the gardens. Most IDP families cannot afford to do this, as most of them have no source of income. Many paddy fields and vegetable gardens are being destroyed by these domestic animals.
7. When the rainy season is over the paddy fields and vegetable gardens will need to be watered by pumps except in some areas where water tanks will provide water via irrigation canals. The shortage of kerosene and diesel due to the GoSL's restrictions will reduce the amount of water pumped and the usage of tractors for ploughing.
 8. Food items are very costly – a single egg costs Rs. 20 - 30. Vegetables are more than Rs. 300 a kilogram and chillies are Rs. 1000 a kilo.
 9. The Government has stopped the practice of reimbursing the cost of the 3 day cooked meals for the IDPs that are provided by local NGOs.
 10. Due to the fact that there are thousands of IDPs in a GS Division, there are delays in registration of the IDPs. The IDPs must then wait for approval from the Commissioner General of Essential Services through the GA and WFP channels. It takes more than 20 days for an IDP to get dry rations after becoming registered. Some IDPs borrow money from others in order to buy food. In some cases some shopkeepers give food items on the basis of loan. Some of the more affluent IDPs share their food with neighbouring IDPs. Some pawn or sell their valuables. Some forgo their own sustenance in order to give food to the children. Some avoid morning or night meals and only eat one meal a day. When morning dawns all, especially the children, feel terribly hungry because they don't eat at night or the food that they did eat was of bad quality or not of an adequate quantity. The nutritional content of the food that is available is also very low.
 11. People feel lethargic and tired without proper food and adequate nutritional intake. Young children, lactating mothers and pregnant women are more vulnerable and need more nutritious and balanced food. Children are not as playful and active as before due to the lack of adequate nutrition. People are gradually become more and more lean and thin. The lack of adequate nutrition has led to an increase in the number of children presenting with signs of stunting and wasting
 12. The humanitarian crisis in the Vanni is critical and continues to get worse.

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