

MANNAR FIELD MISSION
NOVEMBER 2007

A team from the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, International Movement Against Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) and Law and Society Trust (LST) visited Mannar District from October 6-7 2007 to assess the humanitarian situation in Mannar. The team spoke to local actors and international agencies involved in humanitarian and human rights issues in the district, and to individuals from the displaced communities in camps and shelter sites including Thalvupadu (Mannar Island), Umanakari (Nanathan), St Mary's Church Coconut Estate (Nanathan) and the Nanathan Rice Mills (Nanathan). The following report is one in a series of reports by the above named human rights groups highlighting the human rights and humanitarian issues arising as a result of the upsurge in violence during 2006-7.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The security forces' campaign to seize control of Silavathurai, which was a contested zone between the Government and the LTTE, led to the mass displacement of 3,109 residents from the area (Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services). During the fighting the people fled their homes and sought refuge in the common buildings such as churches. Most of the displacement from the area took place after the military had occupied the area. Hence the people hold the military responsible for the displacement and the present situation. There was little fighting, as it appears that the LTTE had withdrawn prior to the operations. There were, however, civilian casualties numbering at least 13, as a result of a claymore mines, shootings and disappearances.

Compared to previous phases of fighting, the humanitarian response appeared to be better coordinated, both due to the small number of displaced and the military's pre-planning, which included the selection of sites where the displaced should go to. Compared to the displacement in the East, the military in Mannar has proved more responsive to the displaced community's needs allowing the movement of IDPs from sites in Nanathan to Mannar Island and facilitating representative 'Go-and-See' visits for some of the displaced communities. The visits have allowed people to check on their houses and properties, and the initial reports suggested that there had been small items missing from some of the houses but for the most part the houses were intact. It needs to be emphasized that because the displacement was a result of military operations, the onus is on the Government and the military to ensure that the displaced are taken care of and that their rights are protected.

Initially the military promised that the displaced could go back in a couple of days, then the date was postponed to a month, but at present the expected date of return is January 2008. With the delay in return, the displaced will find it more difficult to restore lives and livelihoods as the fishermen are missing the main fishing season for the year and the farmers cannot tend to crops. Because the displacement took place after the military had occupied the Silavathurai area the people see the military as being responsible for their present state and for preventing their return. Return needs to be expedited but it also has to be voluntary, particularly given the manner in which resettlement was carried out in the East where the 'voluntary' nature of the process was clearly in question, as well as due to fears of certain remote communities, particularly those from Mullikulam, who have faced multiple displacement over the course of the conflict and are afraid to move back to their homes.

Currently, most of the displaced are in Nanathan DS Division housed in a number of sites, including in and around public buildings like churches and schools, while a number are also with host families both in Nanathan and Mannar Island. Local communities are extending their support to the displaced and offering their land to house the displaced. Agencies are addressing the needs of the displaced living with host families, but there is need for greater attention, especially if the displacement continues and the displaced attempt to resume their livelihoods such as fishing in their

own boats from Mannar Island. The Catholic Church plays a critical role in mediating between the people and the military but there are increasing calls for INGOs in the area to take up protection issues in addition to their coordination role and provision of assistance.

The military operations in LTTE-controlled areas are still continuing, with artillery bombardments, claymore and other attacks in these areas. It is estimated that more than 16,000 people are displaced in the LTTE-controlled Manthai West and Madu, who for the most part are cut off as the main check points in Mannar have been closed due to the fighting. There is little information regarding the situation of the displaced in these areas. Humanitarian agencies working with the communities are forced to access these areas through the Omanthai checkpoint or from Killinochchi. Agencies are very wary of moving into Manthai West due to recent violence. While humanitarian access is a problem particularly to LTTE-controlled areas, there are also problems with regard to the movement of goods and services into government-controlled Mannar due to the increased security checking, which has had a significant impact on the cost of basic items. In addition to negotiating humanitarian access for goods, people should also be allowed to seek refuge in areas where they feel more secure. Access to and from the Wannu therefore should be facilitated.

CONTEXT

Military operations in Mannar have intensified over the last year with artillery exchanges, commando raids, claymore explosions etc., which have had a significant impact on the civilian population, especially in LTTE-controlled areas in Madhu and Manthai West. On the night of August 31, the security forces launched a military operation, referred by the Government as a humanitarian operation, and secured control of southern Mannara, which was a 'contested zone' during the post-CFA period. Those areas South of Aravi Aru, North of Wilpattu National Park and West of the A 14 highway such as Silavathurai, Musali, Arrippu and Mullikulam are now, according to the Government, "liberated" from the LTTE. Fighting is still on-going in areas such as Madhu and Manthai West, which face mortar fire, skirmishes and ambushes.

The area of Southern Mannar is sparsely populated, partly due to the impact of the twenty year old conflict. The communities are largely Tamil Catholics, but there are also some Hindus. In addition, there are Muslim Communities concentrated particularly in and around Musali, which used to be a Muslim-dominated DS division prior to the expulsion of 1990. The main sources of livelihood are fishing and farming. For many of these communities displacement is not a new experience. In some cases people have experienced multiple displacements, especially in the 1990s when some fled to India or were internally displaced to Madhu and Pessalai Open Relief Centres.

Displacement: Due to the military operations 3,109 individuals have been displaced (according to the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services). People we spoke to stated that they had fled their homes due to several reasons including the sound of loud explosions, reports that they had heard on the radio of on-going military operations in their area, instructions to flee by the military, government officials and the church or following others in their community.

We were told that with the commencement of military operations, communities gathered in key buildings such as churches in search of security. With the escalation of military activities, the people moved out of Southern Mannar to government-controlled areas either of their own volition or on instruction by the military.

The experience of displacement varied depending on the specific areas. In the village of Arrippu on the banks of the Aravi Aru, many of the people were gathered in the church and were told by the troops to vacate the village. Some of the local residents were able to recover items they needed from their houses. Over a three hour period the people waded across the Aravi Aru to Nanathan as the normal ferry could not transport the huge number of people. In Potkerni the people found shelter in

the church compound without any food for the day until the military brought buses and lorries to transport the villagers. The people were not allowed to go to their homes and recover any additional items such as official papers, clothes or jewellery other than what they had taken when they fled their houses. For some of the displaced, all they had were the clothes that they were wearing.

The people in Mullikulam, a village of 158 families (498 individuals) at the southernmost end of Mannar District, were cut off for eight days because the military did not move into that area. There were attempts by the Church and humanitarian agencies to assist the communities trapped there, which included a discussion of air lifting supplies. After eight days the communities walked to Kokkupadiyan before they were able to get on a bus, which took them to a welfare centre.

The displaced were instructed by the military to go to sites in Murungan, such as Don Bosco Vocational Centre and Murugan Maha Vidyalayam, in Rasoolputhuvelli, and in Nanathan, such as the rice mill grounds and St Mary's Church grounds. We were also told of the CID conducting inquiries within these displacement camps, but there were no reports of anyone being arrested or detained.

HUMAN SECURITY

The people in Mannar live in an insecurity environment. There is high level of militarization in government-controlled areas, especially in Mannar Island where civilians told us that there is one military personnel for every ten citizens. Throughout the night and even during the day, we heard shelling from the government-controlled areas to the LTTE areas.

With regards to Southern Mannar, many of the people we spoke to under-lined the fact that there was no resistance by the LTTE to the military operations, and that the LTTE may have withdrawn prior to the operations. Yet, there were a number of killings and abductions of civilians. At least 12 people, including two children, had been killed by a claymore attack while fleeing the area in a van on September 1. No civilians or church leaders were allowed to go to the site, and it was only after three days that priests, accompanied by some others, brought those decomposed bodies to Mannar hospital and buried them late, in the presence of Bishop Rayappu Joseph of Mannar.

An employee of the Musali co-operative stores, a father of three children, was last seen in his motor cycle en-route to Nanathan with the rest of the others fleeing the village. Reportedly, he had been last seen in an army vehicle and is still missing. He is alleged to have had with him co-operative stores money collection and valuables, including jewellery. The authorities have been informed, but no progress seems to have been made in finding out where he is or what happened to him.

Amongst the other stories narrated to us was that of a displaced fisherman, who had seen his 26 year-old brother being taken into a military camp on the main Medawachchiya – Mannar road. His inquiries about his brother's fate had been met with string of denials. The tortured body was later found. The brother had not wanted to pursue the case, saying that "my brother is already dead, but I have a family and children to look after".

There were other violations that we were told of. Two days before we visited, a priest told us of how he had handed over to a local police station a young man suspected of shooting a civilian, having obtained a guarantee that the suspect would not be tortured and produced before a magistrate. "But I was wrong, I went the next day and he had been badly tortured" said the priest, distraught at the confidence he had placed in authorities in producing the young man. We heard some other similar stories attesting to the insecurity in the district. Some civil society leaders told us that a man had been shot just in front of the guest house we were staying. We also heard that a district judge had received threatening calls.

CONDITIONS OF DISPLACEMENT AND PROSPECTS FOR RETURN

Movement of IDPs: Since the initial displacement, a number of IDPs have moved to other sites. Many of the original sites were in schools, hence the re-location of IDPs has allowed these institutions to re-open. The IDPs seemed to have wanted to move as the sites were not ideal with problems of space, privacy and sanitation. There also appears to be a preference among both the displaced and the authorities, for the displaced to be sheltered with host families, rather than in large displacement camps. The displaced from Mullikulam who were initially housed in Murungan M.V expressed a desire to move to Mannar Island. The Bishop of Mannar even located a site on the island where a camp could be constructed. The army reportedly refused to allow IDPs to be concentrated in one site for security reasons. It is interesting to note that the army did not, however, prevent the movement of these IDPs to Mannar Island, where they found shelter with host families in settlements similar to Talvupadu. The Muslim residents from the four villages of Musali initially fled to Murungan, but found it difficult as there was no partitioning that gave the women privacy, and they had no access to a mosque. The 266 individuals from 73 families moved to the nearby Muslim village of Rasoolputhuvelli, where an INGO and local people helped clear the mosque.

Despite all these movements, there are still some camps in Nanathan and Murungan. Nanathan rice mill had some 85 families both in the rice mill building and outside during the time of our visit.

Shelters: In the camps most of the shelters are tarpaulin tents provided by INGOs. Many of the displaced complained of the heat, but in some sites, such as the St Mary's Church Coconut Estate in Nanathan, the trees provided shade and made the tents more liveable. The 36 displaced families are worried that with the impending monsoon the tents will become impractical. The rice mill building in Nanathan has been partitioned using plastic sheets for family units while families outside are in tents.

Many we spoke to complained about shelter, particularly the difficulties faced as a result of living in camps and tents. A criticism was that agencies such as UNHCR were not providing temporary shelter built with cadjun roofing material, which is better able to withstand the heat. A feeling held by many was that there was limited planning by the various agencies in providing for the IDPs.

Shelters are also being constructed for the displaced living with host families. We were able to visit a few sites where there was better planning taking place. For example, in Thalvupadu, ZOA is providing shelter material consisting of metal poles and cadjun roofing material.

Water, Sanitation and Health: Various agencies have taken the responsibility to provide water and sanitation facilities for the displaced. In the host-family sites where there are up to three displaced families, agencies such as Oxfam are constructing additional toilets and providing water. At St Mary's compound a mobile health camp has already been conducted by the Government health officials.

Registration: There seems to be registration of IDPs even though there is a large number of people living with host families. According to the displaced and the groups working with the displaced, communities in Mannar are aware of the process and advantages of registration. This increases the likelihood that the displaced register with the authorities.

Rations: The Government is distributing dry rations provided by WFP. These dry rations are being supplemented by I/NGOs, both in terms of food and NFRI. Minister of Disaster Relief and Resettlement, Rishard Bathurdeen, reportedly provided Rs 2,000 worth of compensation per family for urgent needs. We were told that there were certain disparities between the different groups of IDPs – the recently displaced are eligible for WFP's rations, which are worked out in terms of calorific content, while the case loads from previous years receive the Government's rations, which are based on a costing set in 1989 and which remains unaltered, despite the significant inflation of

prices since then. In addition to the inadequacy of the Government ration, the disparity is a clear violation of the much touted principle of equity.

Education: There appears to be a general policy to allow the children from displaced communities to be accommodated in local schools. This was confirmed by the displaced communities in Mannar Island, Vankallei and Nanathan whom we met. INGOs have attempted to assist local schools by constructing additional “learning spaces.”

Relations between host communities and IDPs: Relations appear to be amenable between the displaced and host families. We were informed that a factor in selecting a particular host community was having relatives and friends in the particular community, enabling IDPs to settle in faster. Some of the IDPs and host families mentioned that in the early days of displacement, the burden was on the host family to provide food, shelter and other essential items, since there was a delay in authorities coming to the assistance of the IDPs. Cases were reported where IDPs were later provided with assistance, but with the absence of assistance to the host families and host communities.

In Thalvupaddu a number of families had provided land for the shelters without any financial exchange, even in cases where the host and the displaced were not related. For instance, in one case a host family had provided land even though there was no compensation or legal document ensuring that his land is returned back to him. The situation of host communities and families need addressing. Some form of assistance to the host community would be useful as the burden is upon them to care for and assist IDPs. In Mannar, where staying with host communities and families seem to be the preferred option by the IDPs as well as the authorities, better planning is required so that tensions do not arise as a result of inequitable treatment.

Economically, the influx of IDPs is advantageous in the short-term as it provides the local fishermen extra labour during the busiest fishing season of the year. In the long term, however, problems may arise. The IDPs in Thalvupadu stated that they would like to begin fishing in the area, which may lead to tension with the host community, especially with regard to landing areas on the beach.

We were told that in Rasoolputhuvelli, the host community has taken a number of measures to help the displaced from and around Musali. Both communities are Muslim. The host community helped clear the land for setting up the shelters so that the displaced, who were in Don Bosco, could move to a site where they felt more comfortable and had access to a mosque. The mosque committee has reportedly even offered 20 acres of mosque land for the displaced to cultivate.

‘Go-And-See’ Visits: The army permitted some individuals to visit their villages following their displacement. Beyond this ad hoc measure, the military has also established a procedure for more systematic ‘go-and-see’ visits for representatives from the displaced communities to visit their villages, in order to check whether their properties are safe and intact. At the time of our visit the military had permitted ‘go-and-see’ visits for the village of Arrippu. In addition to village representatives, ten representatives from each of the *padus* (village units) could visit the sites. Those who visited were able to check on their properties and recover possessions which they required, including documents, clothes etc. The displaced took a hired tractor to the crossing point at Aravi Aru. The army provided a tractor from the river to their village, for which the displaced had to provide diesel. The communities from Silavathurai, Musali and Mullikulam had yet to be allowed to visit their communities at the time of our visit.

Those who had visited their villages informed us that each of the houses had a white sticker across it, in order to make clear that the building had been checked by the military. In some cases, the doors had been broken by villagers fleeing in haste. The people we spoke to stated that big objects,

including furniture and televisions, were not missing, but reported the loss of small items, such as transistor radios. We were also told of an instance where the owners found a TV, not previously owned by them, in their home.

Other communities from Southern Mannar should be allowed to visit their homes and communities, particularly because the President Mahinda Rajapakse stated on September 2 that Silavathurai had been captured and cleared. Overall, the 'go-and-see' visits in Mannar seem to be speedier and more representative than the visits organized in the East. The visits seem to have an impact in decreasing the fears and tensions of the displaced communities and in creating a better relationship between the military and the civilian population. For example, there was one incident in which the military had brought back a fishing net that they had found by the sea shore to give to the community at their displacement camp.

Return: Initially the military had announced that the displaced would be allowed to return to their homes and communities within 72 hours. This was later delayed to a week, and then a month. Currently the official position is that the displaced will be allowed to resettle by January 2008. There was no consultation among the relevant actors, including the affected communities and civil society. No official reason has been given. Many of the people we spoke to did not know the reason and assumed it for security reasons. Since the LTTE withdrew in the face of military operations, and at least in some cases the displacement took place after the military had reached the population centres, many of the communities and the civilian communities in Mannar at large see no reason why they should not be allowed to resettle.

Many of the displaced communities whom we spoke to expressed a strong desire to return. They gave three main reasons:

- they wanted to return back to their day-to-day lives and did not want to continue living in displacement;
- the main fishing season for the year is during the impending monsoon season so the fishing communities do not want to miss the most lucrative period;
- and the displaced, a number of whom live in tents, do not want to go through the experience of camp life during the height of the monsoon.

"We are not poor people. We were able to live well before this" a displaced man told us. Many of the displaced reiterated the point that they were self-sufficient before the displacement and were able to support themselves without external assistance, and therefore were determined to regain their quality of life.

Some communities, however, are wary of returning immediately. Villages in the Southern most tip of Mannar, around Mullikulam are afraid of returning and are exhausted by the multiple displacements within Mannar and outside, including to India, that they have had to undergo over the decades of war. Some said that they would like to return when there is a final peace settlement, while others stated that if some of the surrounding villagers, including the Muslims who were expelled in 1990, resettled, they would also do so. In the meantime they suggested that they should be allowed to resettle in Mannar Island. Following the official closure of the Pessalai Welfare Centre in Mannar Island, it seems that there is a general reluctance to open new camps on the island. If the displaced re-settle in different communities it is unclear whether the local fishing industry will tolerate new fishing boats, especially given the current security restrictions on fishing and the over fishing in areas where fishermen are allowed access.

KEY ISSUES

Disaster Preparedness and Responsibility for the Humanitarian Response: The response to the displacement seemed to indicate a better level of planning on the part of the military, especially compared to other displacements in the East. The smaller numbers in Mannar made the

displacement more manageable. The military seemed to be executing a clearly planned military operation with a specific agenda relating to the civilian operation; there were instructions for people to move out of the area, and sites identified by the military where the displaced should go. We were also informed that the military had conveyed the information to the communities as well as the Church, ensuring that movement took place speedily. It needs to be stated that because the displacement took place due to military operations and security forces demanded that people evacuate after the forces established control, there is an onus on the State to take the primary responsibility for dealing with the humanitarian consequences.

The military also provided food for the first day until the humanitarian community – INGOs, NGOs and the Catholic Church - were able to provide resources to the people over the following days and weeks. These actors have taken a critical role in providing assistance and addressing the needs of the local community. The government is supposed to provide cooked food for the first week, but it was the NGOs and INGOs who stepped in and provided for the IDPs. This is a trend that has been witnessed in other areas where there has been an influx of IDPs. There is a growing dependency on humanitarian agencies to provide for the affected communities, when in fact the primary responsibility rests with the authorities, particularly when displacement is caused by their pre-planned military operations.

The agencies have taken a prominent role in organizing coordination mechanisms. The participation by agencies can often be advantageous for beneficiaries, as these actors raise the concerns of the affected communities and have the leverage to better ensure that the Government responds to them. One of the agency personnel whom we spoke to stated that there are numerous coordination meetings, but that they do not necessarily result in coordination on the ground. There are also concerns that coordination by international agencies results in the dis-empowering of Government (which is represented at the coordination meetings) and takes the onus of responsibility away from the Government. There is also a perception that local initiatives of NGOs and organizations are also dis-empowered by these international agency driven initiatives.

There were also IDPs, host communities and civilians who felt that agencies such as the UNHCR and other INGOs could be more proactive in providing assistance and protection. Many of the people we spoke to felt that a stronger protection and advocacy role by the UN agencies and other international agencies would assist the work of the local groups and the Church.

Given the prevalence of host families, it seems that there is local capacity and willingness to deal with displacement, but this need to be strengthened so as to avoid putting pressure on the local communities.

Critical Actors: The Catholic Church plays a dominant role in Mannar, with the Bishop, Ryappu Jospeh, in particular interceding and mediating on behalf of the civilian community. The respect that the Church demands as a religious institution, and what it has earned with the Government and armed actors, makes it the most influential actor within the civilian community. Valvuthayam is a church-driven relief agency that provides relief assistance to affected communities, and has played a significant role in providing humanitarian aid to the Mannar displaced. The Church plays a key role in all the main civilian bodies, including the Mannar Citizens' Committee and the Mannar NGO Consortium, creating a heavy reliance on the Church. This is unlike any other place in the North and East. This situation is both beneficial and detrimental, as there is at least one civilian institution, the Church, which has been able to speak on behalf of the civilians of Mannar, but it has meant that there is an over-dependence on the Church, which plays a dominant role in all civilian bodies.

It does not seem that international agencies play as prominent a role in protection issues; there were frustrations voiced by Mannar civilians who wanted key international agencies to take up some of the

main advocacy issues. Civilians themselves are scared to speak out and engage in advocacy due to fear; this fear has heightened after the killing of Rev. Fr. Pakiaranjith, Catholic Priest and Coordinator of Mannar District Jesuit Refugee Services. Frustration was largely felt towards the UN actors, whose role is needed more proactively in protection issues. People we spoke to mentioned that UNHCR and UNICEF could be more involved in monitoring, documenting and advocacy, and thereby raise the deteriorating human security situation.

Humanitarian Access and Freedom of Movement: Humanitarian agencies face a number of difficulties in the current context. Access to LTTE-controlled areas has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, through any of the crossing points in Mannar. Access through the main checkpoint at Uyilankulam is currently not possible due to the heavy shelling, which also led to the withdrawal of the ICRC point in no man's land. During the Madhu Church Festival, access was permitted from Uliyankulum. Agencies from Mannar that work with communities in LTTE-controlled Mannar are forced to travel to Vavuniya and then enter the Wannu through Omanthai. The whole journey takes between 6 to 8 hours. Humanitarian agencies that have offices in Killinochchi are considering transferring the responsibilities to their Wannu office. Agencies are also increasingly wary of travelling to LTTE-controlled Mannar due to the shelling and claymore attacks, including the claymore that killed Rev. Fr. Pakiaranjith. Like the rest of LTTE-controlled Wannu, there are severe restrictions on the types of material transported from government-controlled areas. Even priests are not allowed to travel with a full tank of petrol in their motorbikes.

The security restrictions within government-controlled areas, for instance, have resulted in a number of challenges to agencies. Vehicles, especially those transporting material, are subject to increased checks. As one agency told us, the agencies do not object to the purpose of the checks, but they are finding it increasingly difficult as the checking takes a long time. As a result, costs of material have increased by as much as 20%. While the price increase is partly due to the additional security checks, it seems that traders are also using this as an excuse to charge higher prices. Under the *Mahinda Chinthanaya*, fertilizer is provided at a cost price of Rs 7 per kilo, but in Mannar it costs Rs 8.60 per kilo.

Local communities told us that they feel that the Government has imposed a collective punishment on the people of Mannar, as the Government has established restrictions on petrol and cement coming into the island. The restrictions are intended to prevent smuggling of these materials into LTTE-controlled areas. Fishing is the main source of income for a significant portion of Mannar's population. The navy imposed restrictions on fishing, including a ban on night-time fishing (times for fishing are 6am- 5pm), no deep sea fishing and daily security checks.

Situation in LTTE-controlled Mannar: The situation of civilians in LTTE-controlled Mannar is an issue of critical concern. During our visit, artillery firing into LTTE-controlled areas began from late afternoon and continued throughout the night. Many of the humanitarian actors that we spoke to feared that the fighting would intensify, and thereby increase displacement and the hardships faced by the people.

Some of the largest concentrations of IDPs in the LTTE-controlled Mannar are in Periyamadhu. Manthai West D.S division (LTTE-controlled) has the largest number of the displaced in Mannar, numbering 15,451 (UNHCR September 30 2007). Madhu Church and its environs hosted a large population of displaced until May this year, who were then forcibly pushed out of the camp and shelters by the LTTE. As a result of the Church's protection, the LTTE found it difficult to recruit children and adults. Then forced out of Madhu, the people became vulnerable to the LTTE's forcible recruitment. As of September 30 there were 1,441 displaced persons in the Madhu D.S division. At various points of the conflict, Madhu has served as a refuge for displaced people and become an undeclared peace zone. For the most part, both the armed forces and the LTTE have respected the

sanctity of the site and not entered the site with arms and launch attacks against it. There have been repeated calls by the Church of Mannar to make it a peace zone, but neither the Government nor the LTTE have taken concrete steps to do so, despite rhetorical commitments following lobbying by Church leaders.

With the intensification of shelling, people are reportedly moving northwards. Some of the men, purportedly, have not gone into displacement as they are attempting to harvest their crops and protect their properties. The problem of access that humanitarian agencies face has made it increasingly difficult for them to ensure adequate food and shelter for the displaced and other affected communities, especially during periods of intense fighting when the Omathai checkpoint is closed. The current situation requires that more attention is placed on ensuring that humanitarian agencies are able to execute their efforts.

Some agencies are finding it difficult to move material, such as galvanized iron roofing sheets, into LTTE-controlled areas. Agencies also spoke of the delays in moving material from Colombo to LTTE-controlled areas, as vehicles are subject to multiple checks along the A-9. A proposal that has been put forward by some agencies, to which the army does not object, is to move material by train, with the checking done during the loading in Colombo and unloading in Vavuniya. A significant challenge to this is that the railway authorities do not have enough carriages and also require a stronger engine. However, the *Yal Devi* train service to Vavuniya has been temporarily suspended, hence this proposal is unlikely to be taken up.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of resettlement needs to be fast-tracked: Resettlement needs to speed up in order to address the existing humanitarian situation, decrease the hardships faced by the affected communities and to avoid setting back the process of rehabilitation. Designing the timeline of resettlement purely on military considerations, without taking into account the life cycles of communities, will have significant repercussions. In particular, it will impact humanitarian assistance, the dependency of local communities on external assistance, the rehabilitation of livelihoods and the long-term process of normalization. Given the previous experiences of forcible resettlement by the Government in the East (including Mutur in September 2006, Vakara in February 2007 and Vavunathivu in May 2007), it is important that the Government does ensure that the process is voluntary.

Recognize the freedom of movement of IDPs: The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement recognises the rights of IDPs, the right of return and the need to protect IDPs from being forcibly resettled. While every effort needs to be taken to ensure that resettlement can proceed, it is critical that the authorities ensure that the process is voluntary and that measures are taken to prevent putting pressure on the IDPs to move, including measures such as the cutting off of rations.

The Guiding Principles also recognize the rights of IDPs to seek safety in another part of the country. Given the severe restrictions in terms of movement of civilians between LTTE-controlled and government-controlled areas, the displaced do not have the freedom to choose to move to an area that they perceive to be safer. The rights of the displaced in LTTE-controlled Mannar need to be taken into account to ensure that they are allowed to move to areas where they feel safe.

Increase 'go-and-see' visits: While commending the current policy of the military to allow and facilitate 'go-and-see' visits for the heads of households of particular communities, this program has to be expanded to other communities. In addition, a system needs to be put in place in order to ensure that losses can be reported once the house owners, as opposed to community leaders, have been able to inspect their properties and compensation provided in case of reported losses.

Need for site de-commissioning: While there are only a few large camps, I/NGOs need to make sure that they earmark funding for de-commissioning sites once the displaced resettle or move from the sites. The experience from the East is that some of the larger sites have not yet been de-commissioned, making such sites health and environmental hazards. Decommissioning would also make locals less apprehensive of accepting displaced communities in the future, especially in the case of host families.

Equity: Assistance to IDPs needs to be equitable. In terms of rations, there is a distinction being made between recent IDPs who receive the WFP rations, which are worked out in terms of calorific content, and the case loads of IDPs from previous years who receive the Government's rations, which are based on a costing set in 1989 and which remains unaltered, despite the significant inflation of prices since then. The disparity is a clear violation of the much touted principle of equity and needs to be reviewed. Regardless of where they reside, be it IDP camps or with host communities, IDPs need to be treated and provided for equally. In addition, attention needs to be given to host families and host communities who have the extra burden of caring for IDPs. Authorities and I/NGOs need to take on board the needs of the host communities and provide assistance to them, thereby reducing any tension in the future.

Humanitarian Access: The situation of the displaced and affected communities in LTTE-controlled areas is a pressing concern that needs to be urgently addressed. The Government forces and the LTTE should accede to demands for a 'humanitarian corridor' and ensure that all military operations, including aerial and artillery bombardments, raids and claymore attacks, are prevented. The Uyilankulam checkpoint needs to be re-opened. In the mean time, steps need to be taken to streamline the checking at Omanthai and address the bureaucratic bottle necks, which delay access and increase the cost. More personnel and equipment (including telephones) are required in Vavuniya to meet the additional security requirements, and communication between Colombo and Vavuniya regarding the authorization of permission needs to be improved. Humanitarian agencies also need to re-orient their operations in order to develop the capacity to provide resources for and to monitor the situation from Killinochchi or Vavuniya of the displaced and affected communities in LTTE-controlled Mannar.

Declare Madhu a Peace Zone: This has been a repeated demand by the people of Mannar and the Church in Mannar. Having such a site would provide the displaced people of Mannar a refuge from the increasing violence. Both the Government and the LTTE have stated their willingness to consider this, but Church leaders fear that government forces may launch attacks as they try to advance to Vanni areas. All parties should publicly commit themselves that to agree that they will not launch attacks against the site nor enter the area bearing weapons, nor try to intimidate civilians there through other means, such as intimidation. There should be independent mechanisms, comprising civil society, church and international agencies, to monitor this. A critical component to the peace zone will be ensuring humanitarian access.

On November 13 a child was killed and an old woman was injured in front of the Inquiry Office of the Madhu Church making clear that the site is being attacked despite the assurances.