

# Internally Displaced Persons: The Situation of Sri Lanka

## Internally Displaced Persons

**I**nternally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are people who have been forced to flee their homes, but have remained within their country's borders. A United Nations report, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* uses the definition:

".....internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border"

## The World Situation

It is very difficult to get accurate figures for IDPs, because populations are constantly fluctuating; some IDPs may be returning home while others are fleeing, others may periodically return to IDP camps to take advantage of humanitarian aid. While the case of IDPs in large camps, such as those in Darfur, western Sudan, are relatively well-reported, it is very difficult to assess those IDPs who flee to larger towns and cities. It is necessary, in many instances, to supplement official figures with additional information obtained from operational humanitarian organisations on the ground. Additionally, most official figures only include those displaced by conflict or natural disasters.

Development-induced IDPs often are not included in assessments. Some information on IDPs in the world (as of December 2006), according to Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2006) is shown below:

- Total conflict-related IDP population: 26.5 million
- Number of countries affected: At least 52
- Most affected continent: Africa (11.8 million IDPs in 21 countries)
- Countries with highest number of IDPs: Sudan (5 million), Colombia (3.8 million), Iraq (1.7 million), Uganda (1.7 million), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (1.1 million)
- Number of countries with conflicts generating displacement: 23
- Countries with most new displacement: Lebanon, DRC, Iraq, Sudan, Israel
- Countries with most returns: Sudan, Lebanon, DRC, Uganda, Israel, Sri Lanka
- Countries with worst displacement situations (in alphabetical order): Burma (Myanmar), Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Uganda
- Estimated number of IDPs exposed to serious threats to their physical safety: 15.6 million
- Countries with governments or occupation forces directly or indirectly involved in deliberately displacing people: Burma (Myanmar), CAR, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Iraq, Lebanon,

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Kenya, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Philippines, Senegal, Sudan (Darfur), Uganda (Karamoja), Zimbabwe

- Estimated number of IDPs without any significant humanitarian assistance from their governments: 5 million in at least 11 countries
- Estimated number of IDPs faced with governments indifferent or hostile to their protection needs: 6 million in at least 13 countries
- Proportion of women and children among IDPs: 70-80%

The largest IDP populations are found in Colombia, the DRC, Iraq, Sudan and Turkey, each with IDP populations of over one million. An updated country-wise breakdown can be found in IDMC Global Statistics. It has been estimated that between 70% and 80% of all IDPs are women and children.

The problem of protecting and assisting IDPs is not a new issue. In international law, it is the responsibility of the government concerned to provide protection and assistance for the IDPs in their country. However, as many of the displaced are a result of civil conflict and violence or where the authority of the central State is in doubt, there is no local authority willing to protect and assist them. It has been estimated that some

5 million IDPs in 11 countries are without any significant humanitarian assistance from their governments.

Globally, there are 11.4 million refugees and 26.4 million IDPs according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Darfur crisis affected 4.2 million people and displaced 2 million in 2004, and today, 448,889 people are still living as IDPs. In Chad where 700,000 have had to flee due to fighting, more than 185,000 people have displaced and are living in camps. In Congo, around 1.36 million have displaced with 45,000 dying each month from poverty-related causes and other diseases. The lives of innocent in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of continuing war will reveal even more gruesome stories.

#### **IDPs in Sri Lanka History**

Thousands of Muslim families lived in the Northern province (in Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mulaithivu and Jaffna districts) were forcibly evicted from their residence by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 27 October 1990. When they set out looking for shelter elsewhere, they were able to carry with them only some clothes and a hand luggage containing a few personal items. These IDPs have reached different unknown destinations within one or two days. Most of them reached Kalpitiya area by the sea, and some of them have travelled on roads to different areas, such as Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, Gampaha, Kandy, Kaluthara, Galle and Matara. Out of these IDPs majority are living in different Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions in the Puttalam District. These DS divisions are; Kalpitiya, Mundalam, Puttalam, and Vanathavilluwa.

It was estimated that, there are 141 IDP camps in Puttalam District with a settler population of nearly one hundred thousand. In the absence of a plan for resettlement or an alternative solution to the problems of these internally displaced at that time, three successive generations of these early IDPs have been subjected to face the adverse consequences of terrorism that prevailed during last 30 years.

#### **Measures taken by present government**

In order to deal with the problems faced by the Muslim IDPs from the North, a separate Secretariat for IDPs has been established in Puttalam with the intervention of the President, and the Minister for Resettlement and Disaster Services. This secretariat now solves diverse problems confronted by the IDPs.

#### **Resettlement of IDPs of the Eastern province**

It was with the launching of the humanitarian operations in the Eastern province, the present government initiated mobilisations to get rid of terrorism in the country. After liberating the East from the grip of terrorism, the government was confronted with several other challenges. The principal among these challenges was the issue of resettlement of the displaced. The task of resettlement entailed issues relating to de-mining and revitalisation of developmental activities. The restoration or establishment of infrastructural facilities, roads and road ways, schools, irrigation electricity health and health care, transport, etc., in these areas was coincided with the initial process of de-mining.

The resettlement process that was started on 27 April 2006 in several

phases was completed on 27 November 2009. In all, 36,123 families consisting of 123,907 persons were thus resettled in Vavunatheevu, Chenkaladi, Kiran, Pattipalai Vellavali and Vakarai divisions in Batticaloa district. Similarly, 20,395 IDP families consisting of 75,199 persons were resettled in Verugal, Muthur and Seruvila divisions in Trincomalee district. Not only the international community commended the present government over this success story of resettlement, but also the latter has been able to set an example to them as a model in systematic resettlement.

In the process of resettlement, the resettled families have been provided with dry ration adequate for 06 months, grain seeds and fertiliser for cultivation, fishing boats and fishing gears. On the other hand, the implementation of massive developmental activities in the Eastern province has helped the local population also to reap the benefits. Furthermore, the civil administration in those areas has been re-established, and the IDPs' franchise rights were restored, thus, allowing them to enjoy the freedom, like other citizens in the country.

#### **Resettlement of IDPs of the Northern province**

As the security forces which liberated the East from the curse of terrorism launched the humanitarian operation in the North, tens of thousands of civilians escaped the clutches of terrorists, seeking State security in safer areas. The government promptly mobilised humanitarian programmes and projects through establishment of Relief Villages and Centres along with other essential facilities in order to take care of the well-being of this population who vested confidence in the

government and sought its assistance. Vavuniya district became the hub of the welfare activities for the Internally Displaced carried out under these State-sponsored humanitarian programmes and projects.

As the terrorists were confronting the security forces using the innocent Tamil people as a human shield, the security forces did their utmost to rescue them during the operation. As a result, a huge influx of the trapped was able to seek protection as IDPs in the government controlled areas. By 20<sup>th</sup> May 2009, number of IDPs rose up to 288,938.

The government, in the face of an unprecedented massive influx of IDPs, launched a pragmatic plan for ensuring all essential humanitarian relief assistance, including shelter and related facilities to arriving IDPs by way of promptly establishing Relief Villages and acquiring public buildings for Relief Centres. As the North was liberated from the terrorists, the government was charged with the responsibility of taking care of the well-being of 288,938 persons in all. It was for carrying out this humanitarian responsibility that the government started establishing Relief Villages, such as, Kathirgamar RV, Anandakumaraswamy RV, Ramanathan RV, Arunachelam RV, and Relief Villages in Zones 04, 05, 06 and 07.

The IDPs have thus been provided with transitional shelter and all other essential relief facilities in 16 Relief Villages and Relief Centres in Vavuniya, 07 in Jaffana, 04 in Mannar and 01 in Trincomalee districts. In the mobilisation of these massive humanitarian relief operations, the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services as well as

almost all other Ministries played their respective role to fulfil the essential services and supply of humanitarian material assistance promptly and systematically in an exemplary manner. A humanitarian master plan was set in motion to ensure provision of essentials, such as cooked food, dry ration, drinking water, sanitary facilities, educational, health and health care facilities, co-operative outlets, post offices, communication centres, shops and markets, banks, etc. The government expenditure stood at a daily average of Rupees 25 million for maintenance and provision of these humanitarian facilities.

The government was compelled to incur a huge expenditure for the import of de-mining tools and machinery, in addition to the resources committed for manpower and expertise. The security forces in association with the Non-Governmental Organisations and International Agencies were able to accelerate the on-going de-mining activities in the North in keeping with the principal objective of the government to ensure protection and security of the resettled population.

The first phase of '**the Uthuru Vasanthaya**' (The Northern Spring), the master plan for resettlement of the Internally Displaced sheltered in the Manik Farm Relief Villages in Vavuniya was inaugurated under the stewardship of the Chairman of the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern province and the Minister for Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, on August 05, 2009 at the Municipality Grounds in Vavuniya. Thus, the resettlement process is now being continued in different phases. In addition, steps taken under this programme included facilitating

university education for 174 university students from the Internally Displaced population and accommodating 9,066 IDPs over the age of 60 yrs in homes for elders as well as helping 141 clergymen and 312 members of their families and the public servants and 13 members of their families to voluntarily leave the Relief Villages to the places of their interest.

The number of persons resettled as at 07<sup>th</sup> December 2009 stands at 158,611. The resettlement of all the Internally Displaced from Jaffna district has already been completed. Similarly, the IDPs from Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara districts who were sheltered in the Manik Farm, have also been resettled. The resettlement of IDPs of the Musali Division is also continuing. As such, the public establishments including the school buildings used for sheltering these IDPs have now been reverted to be used for the purposes they are meant for. The remaining of 113,528 or so IDPs will, until such time, continue to be provided with all necessary facilities.

On the directives of the President, steps have been taken to maintain all Relief Villages and Welfare Camps as open Centres with effect from 01 December, 2009. It will thus ensure free movement of the IDP dwellers in those areas. The public have welcomed this decision. The President has also promised that all the IDP families will be resettled in their own places of usual residences by 31 January 2010. The resettled population are provided with dry ration adequate for six months, grain seeds and fertiliser and fishing boats and fishing gears, etc. as livelihood support as well as construction materials and a sum of Rupees fifty thousand as shelter grants.

An accelerated process of developmental activities is under way in the North under the **Uthuru Vasanthaya Programme**. Under this programme, all infrastructure facilities, such as electricity, roads, highways and bridges, irrigation, etc. are being established or restored in the province. Implementation of such a developmental strategy helps to create a better living condition and atmosphere than what prevailed in the past for the local population. More importantly, the people of the province who were deprived hitherto of their franchise are now free to enjoy such fundamental rights in the elections henceforth.

This resettlement process is being monitored by the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, while the Sri Lanka Army is finalising security clearance of the resettling areas and the transport of the settler families by the assistance of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to the respective Divisional Secretariat areas. All relevant Divisional Secretaries have undertaken the responsibility of providing necessary assistance to the re-settlers under the supervision of the respective District Secretaries to ensure proper establishment of the IDPs back in their villages.

#### **Resettlement Assistance to Returning IDPs**

The assistance package shall be as follows:

##### **Dry food**

Each family is provided with dry rations sufficient for 2 weeks at the time of return. The World Food Programme (WFP) has agreed to continue to provide dry foods for a period of 6 months. Necessary arrangements are made to have this dry food distributed over this

six month period through cooperative retail outlets or other organisations.

##### **Kitchen utensils**

Each IDP settler family is provided with a package of kitchen utensils to restart their lives back in their habitats. Most of the IDP families had already been provided with this package while staying in the Relief Villages or Welfare Camps. Those families who received the kitchen utensils are taking them on their resettlement. Others who had not received the utensils or those who need replacements are provided with the package on their arrival in their places of abode.

##### **Return kit**

The UNHCR is providing a return kit for each family on their arrival to resettling villages. The items in this return kit included bed linen, clothing, plastic buckets, Ropes, basic survival equipment, lighting and home utensils. The Ministry is coordinating with the UNHCR to have this kit distributed systematically.

##### **Housing assistance**

The UNHCR is providing a shelter assistance of Rs. 25,000.00 for each returning family. Of this amount, Rs. 5,000/- is made available to each family on the day of return by each of the District Secretaries, while the balance Rs. 20,000/- is accessible to them through the closest branch of the Bank of Ceylon. The Government is making arrangements to provide an additional Rs. 25,000/- to each family to meet additional expenses of resettling from 15 December 2009.

##### **Agricultural implements**

The Government of India is providing a set of agricultural implements to each returning family, which includes a mamoty, prong mammoties and a large

kathy. The Ministry of Nation Building is coordinating with the Government of India to receive these agricultural implements while the distribution of these implements is done by the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services.

##### **Roofing sheets**

The Government of India is providing 12 roofing sheets per family to help the IDPs in reconstructing their dwelling houses. The Ministry of Nation Building is coordinating the distribution of these sheets with this Ministry.

##### **Seed paddy**

The Ministry of Agriculture, under the Abandoned Paddy Land Re-cultivation Programme, is providing 3 bushels of seed paddy for each family. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is coordinating with the Ministry of Agriculture to have this seed paddy distributed through the Provincial Agricultural Department.

##### **Expenses of paddy cultivation**

Under the Abandoned Paddy Land Re-cultivation Programme, each family is being given a grant of Rs. 4,000/- per acre for land preparation. The IOM is coordinating with the Ministry of Agriculture in this programme, while the Department of Agrarian Development is implementing it at the Divisional Secretariat level.

##### **Fertiliser and chemicals**

The returning farmer families are also provided with fertiliser and chemicals by the subsidy scheme of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Department of Agrarian Development is making arrangements to make this fertiliser and chemicals available to these returning farmers at the subsidised rate.

## Kadjan shelter

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and IOM have made arrangements to provide the following items for resettlement to some families in Mannar District:

- a. 150 Kadjan leaves
- b. Nine poles
- c. One window and one door frame
- d. 3 kg of nails
- e. 5 Bags of cement
- f. One hammer
- g. One saw
- h. One toilet squatting pan
- i. PVC pipes
- j. Type plan

## Conclusion

Sri Lanka has taken immediate action for the provision of basic needs and providing welfare facilities for the IDPs in a short period of time. Accelerated development programmes are under way in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Under these programmes, all infrastructural facilities, such as, electricity, roads, highways and bridges, irrigation, schools and hospitals, are established or restored. Implementation of such a developmental strategy helps to

create a better living conditions and atmosphere than what prevailed in the past for the local population. The re-establishment of civil administration, after several decades, is also under way by establishing *Grama Niladhari* offices and Divisional Secretariats under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Police posts are established to maintain law and order. More importantly, the people who were deprived hitherto of their franchise are now free to enjoy such fundamental rights in the elections henceforth.

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The prolonged conflict has had various implications on shaping the macro economic framework of the country to deal with the situation. In particular, the fiscal policy formulation was impacted by many developments during the conflict period and hence, the monetary and other policies were also, to a certain extent, driven with the implications that emanated from the conflict time fiscal policy. However, the new environment provides an opportunity to restructure the policies to facilitate the rehabilitation and reconstruction process in the North and East and to provide necessary support to stakeholders in the entire country to go forward. Strong macro-economic fundamentals with sound fiscal management, low inflation, and strong balance of payment position will be conducive in facilitating long-term investment. In addition, the long-term sustainability of unleashing the

full growth potential of the country will depend upon a number of other factors, including the creation of a lasting solution to the underlying causes of the internal conflict and successful implementation of the already identified and other necessary structural changes in the public sector. The success of the effective use of both the terrorism free environment and much more opportunities that have been generated by the new situation, complemented by the implementation of appropriate structural changes, will ultimately decide the macro level outcome of the ending of the conflict.

## References:

Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Reports, 2007 and 2008.

Three year Eastern Province Development Plan: 2007-2010, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Planning.

Three year Investment Programme for the Northern Province: 2010-2012, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Planning.

## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author and are not those of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup> The All Share Price Index (ASPI) and Milanka Price Index (MPI) closed at 3,385.6 and 3,849.4, respectively on 30 December 2009 compared to that of 2,030.9 and 2,230.3 on 18 May 2009. The market capitalization also increased to Rs. 1,092.14 billion from Rs. 661.75 billion on 18 May 2009. The Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) was recognized as the second best performing stock exchange in the world in 2009.