



1 year after the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Women marginalised and excluded from the reconstruction process

Honourable President Mahinda Rajapakse,

One year after the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, affected women in Sri Lanka continue to be marginalised, discriminated and excluded from the process of rebuilding on all levels: the family, the community and the nation.

1. **Thousands of women and children still live in camps and other temporary facilities** which lack adequate sanitation, clean water, health services and security. Government compensations have not reached them or are insufficient to restore their livelihoods.
2. **Women's right to food is violated.** People are on the verge of starvation getting one meal a day. The food rations provided are of very low quality. This affects health of children and pregnant, breast feeding and elderly women.
3. Women suffer from increased **domestic violence** in camps and temporary shelters, as a result of increased alcoholism. There is inadequate protection provided by the police and camp administration because of the general perception of violence against women being a personal matter.
4. Children in camps and temporary shelters do not have **access to education**. Government scholarships are not sufficient to cover education costs. Schools are too far away from camps and transport is not provided.
5. Both **temporary and permanent housing facilities** are of low standards in design and construction and climatic conditions have not been taken into account. Facilities do not meet women's needs: there are no kitchen and bathing facilities. People remain uncertain regarding permanent housing. The Sri Lanka Government's policy on buffer zone implies that fishermen and others are denied assistance in any rebuilding activities within 100-200 meters from the shoreline. However, hotels and tourist resorts near the sea have been restored.
6. The tsunami exacerbated **women's access to land**. Women do not have ownership rights to land registered to the names of their husband and father killed in the tsunami as women are not recognised as head of household. Bureaucratic procedures for ownership rights transfer on the land allocated for building homes for tsunami survivors slow down the reconstruction process and leave thousands of tsunami survivors homeless.

7. **Jobs and livelihoods:** women lost their jobs and livelihood sources. The Sri Lankan government has failed to respond effectively and survivors have to rely on NGO support.
8. **Armed conflict in Sri Lanka** exacerbates human rights situation. Children recruitment as soldiers has increased after the tsunami. Presence of armed forces inside the camps has increased the vulnerability of women to violence and threatens their security rather than provides protection. The military hinder free movement of people and distribution of relief.

In the light of the above, we express grave concern about lack of consultation with the people affected by the tsunami in the relief and reconstruction process. We demand that:

- Ø The Government of Sri Lanka must speed up the process of housing reconstruction and permanent resettlement and assist non-governmental organisations involved in housing construction in obtaining ownership rights to the land allocated for building houses for the tsunami survivors.
- Ø The Government of Sri Lanka must consult and involve affected people in the process of reconstruction and rebuilding. International and national NGOs must consult with the affected communities in planning, design and implementation of projects.
- Ø We are also aware of significant foreign assistance received by the Government of Sri Lanka, international and national NGOs and demand transparency and accountability in the funds spending.
- Ø Both state and non-state agencies working with the displaced must recognise and address gender specific and special needs of women.
- Ø Recognise the needs and rights of children, elderly, disabled, women living with HIV/AIDS and affected women who need long-term medical and psychological treatment and assistance.
- Ø The Government must immediately provide gender disaggregate data in tsunami affected region.
- Ø The Government of Sri Lanka must ensure that relief and reconstruction activities are implemented without discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, age, migration, citizenship and other factors.
- Ø The Government of Sri Lanka must recognise the rights of the fishing communities to the sea and the coastal land and ensure that business interests in the rebuilding process do not negatively impact livelihoods of the seashore people.

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