

Overview

The security situation in Sri Lanka has deteriorated rapidly, with conflict erupting on three separate fronts across the North and East in the past month. In the East, the latest clashes between government forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have compounded displacement caused by a market bomb and subsequent communal violence earlier in April this year. In the North, the fighting has uprooted considerable proportions of the population and cut vital supply routes. Political efforts to further the peace process have stalled and, with persistent hostilities, it is widely believed that the humanitarian situation will worsen.

At 4th September, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka stands at 239,997 individuals (62,792 families). In addition, at the same date, India had reported some 12,061 new refugee arrivals since January 2006, with over 5,700 arrivals in August alone.



Sri Lanka / IDPs / A young IDP girl plays underneath a UNHCR tarp at a makeshift camp in Thampalagama, near Trincomalee, Sri Lanka on Saturday August 19th 2006. / UNHCR / N. Ng / August 2006

In early 2006, UN agencies and their partners developed an inter-agency plan which was endorsed by the Government of Sri Lanka. The plan established response mechanisms and strategies for three possible scenarios involving different numbers of IDPs and varying degrees of violence. In light of the current situation, UNHCR has moved its Sri Lanka operation into 'scenario III – high intensity conflict', under which UNHCR will be dealing with the displacement of up to 400,000 people.

Access to IDPs and freedom of movement for civilians, humanitarian agency staff and relief supplies are among the most prominent challenges confronting UNHCR and other aid agencies. This is in part the result of security restrictions due to the ongoing hostilities, but also as a result of restrictions on movement into areas under LTTE control and the closure of the A9 road north of Vavuniya, cutting the supply route to Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna. Since late August a few relief convoys have been granted access to some areas, some relief supplies have been shipped to Jaffna, and UN chartered flights have landed to Jaffna. Whilst this is a positive development, it is still not sufficient to meet the humanitarian needs.

In the context of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP), launched on 30th August, humanitarian responses are being prepared according to sector, i.e. protection, human rights, education, food, shelter, water and sanitation, health and non food relief items. UNHCR has been designated as lead agency for protection, shelter, NFRI, and IDP site management.

Challenges

- As a result of the escalating conflict the civilian population has become increasingly vulnerable and suffers from a lack of protection, forced recruitment (including child recruitment), abduction, torture and murder. The violence has disrupted the day-to-day lives of tens of thousands of people hindering their access to food, employment, health facilities, and education.
- The successive pressures brought by the 1983-2002 civil war, the 2004 Tsunami, and now the recent conflict have led to the breakdown of family structures and social safety nets, seriously undermining people's ability to cope with the current security environment. Pressures exerted on ethnic groups have already led to the polarization of communities in some areas and could break out into further violence, as demonstrated in Trincomalee in April. This would put a further strain on already fragile local markets and economic structures.
- The number of IDPs has increased dramatically in a relatively short period of time and the situation remains fluid, with multiple displacements frequent. In addition to the protection concerns faced by the civilian population as a whole, the displaced are at a high risk of sexual and gender based violence and may be subject to discrimination and/or marginalisation by host communities, particularly where resources are scarce and communities are divided. The majority of people have fled with little more than they were able to carry and loss of civil documentation is a particular concern at a time when the security forces have increased their checks on civilians and authorities require identity documents to access services.
- As noted above, access to IDPs is severely restricted in many areas, particularly where fighting is ongoing, as well as areas under LTTE control, including considerable areas of Batticaloa, and Mannar and the entire Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts. In addition to being cut off from the rest of Sri Lanka due to the closure of the A9 road, sea and air access to the Jaffna peninsula has also been interrupted and residents of Jaffna are subject to curfews. This has a serious impact on needs assessments, provision of food, non-food relief items and emergency shelter, and protection activities.
- Restrictions on the movement of humanitarian staff and supplies are also hampering the replenishing of supplies of food, fuel and relief items which are soon to run out in several offices, most notably in Kilinochchi and Jaffna.
- Encompassed within the access issue is the wider consideration of security, both for displaced people and staff. Internally displaced people are also becoming increasingly vulnerable as the conflict spreads, encroaching on areas previously deemed safe. The deteriorating security situation also leaves humanitarian staff in a vulnerable position and the 'humanitarian space' has been squeezed to a considerable degree, as manifested most graphically by the killing of the 17 *Action Contre la Faim* staff in Muttur, in early August.
- The political situation in Sri Lanka exerts great pressure on authorities to find quick solutions to the impact of the fighting on the civilian population, with mass displacement the most visible sign of conflict. Even in the face of continuing hostilities, lack of humanitarian assistance, damage to basic infrastructure and the presence of unexploded ordnance, there is a risk that return will be promoted or even coerced before conditions on the ground can ensure return is safe, dignified and sustainable. Any return should be voluntary and based on an informed decision.

Population movements

Trincomalee District in the East of Sri Lanka has been the main source of displacement since April 2006. The situation in this District got dramatically worse after a LTTE offensive on the town of Muthur in early August. As a result, tens of thousands of people from Muthur and surrounding areas moved inland to locations around Kanthale and South to Eachchilampattia. On 4th September, 47,586 individuals remained displaced in Trincomalee District alone. A comparable number are reported to have fled further south down the coast to Batticaloa District, where nearly 60,000 people are registered as newly displaced. This figure includes over 16,000 people displaced by events within the District itself.



Sri Lanka / internally displaced people (idps)
A mother and child in a makeshift camp of UNHCR tarps in Kantale, Sri Lanka on Monday August 21st 2006.
UNHCR / N Ng / August 2006

Some of those displaced from Trincomalee have also moved west across the country to Vavuniya, Puttalam, Anuradhapura and Mannar – the most popular departure point for those who wish to seek refuge in Tamil Nadu, southern India. Since clashes between government forces and the LTTE flared up in mid August, the various districts within this region to the North of Sri Lanka have received people fleeing South from Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu but have also experienced displacement from within the districts themselves. The newly displaced population in Vavuniya and Mannar now stand at over 9,500.

Further North, displacement from Jaffna to Kilinochchi was a key feature of an earlier December 2005-January 2006 movement, before a round of peace talks resumed in February 2006 and calmed tensions for a short while. Residents of Jaffna and Kilinochchi have been severely affected again by the mid-August sudden escalation in fighting, with nearly 48,500 people registered as newly displaced within Jaffna District alone and several hundred stranded on islands to the North of the peninsula, as well as unknown numbers in areas close to the fighting between government forces and the LTTE in the South.

In Kilinochchi, some 35,500 people reported as displaced by events at the beginning of the year had all returned home by the end of March. Now, the tide has turned and there are over 44,000 people registered as displaced by the latest bout of fighting. The host families who managed to shelter January's IDPs have been overwhelmed by this latest influx, leaving at least 18,000 people forced to stay in communal buildings or in the open air. Almost 13,000 IDPs from the North are also registered as displaced with Mullaitivu.



Sri Lanka / internally displaced people (idps) / Displaced Muttur residents make their way back to check on their homes on the road to Muttur on Monday August 21 2006. / UNHCR / N Ng / August 2006

UNHCR's Objectives

The UNHCR's goal is to meet the protection and assistance needs of Sri Lanka's internally displaced people, especially women, children and the elderly. To that end the Office will pursue the following objectives:

- Provide basic protection coverage to IDPs in displacement.
- Ensure that adequate shelter and emergency assistance is provided to the displaced in cooperation with partners.
- Coordinate the management of IDP sites and provide training and support to implementing partners.
- Implement confidence building and stabilization measures to support host communities, mitigate further conflicts and prepare the ground for return.

Activities

In conjunction with UN agencies and other humanitarian actors, UNHCR will carry out the following activities during the emergency phase:

Protection:

- The Office will carry out a rapid study of host family assistance to identify the most effective, and culturally and conflict sensitive methods of providing assistance to host families and communities.
- UNHCR will compile comprehensive data about displaced populations, including age and gender breakdowns, vulnerabilities, place of origin, reasons for flight, future plans and conditions of return.
- The IDP protection situation will be carefully monitored in places of displacement and return.
- Protection interventions will be outlined and implemented, particularly in relation advocating the freedom of movement and prevention of sexual and gender based violence.
- Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to support the protection interventions particularly in the initial return phase, when conditions allow.

Community/Confidence Building:

- Coping mechanisms and community initiatives will be facilitated to address the underlying issues of displacement, increase confidence and stability, and decrease fear and mistrust in communities that suffer from violence and hostile acts.
- In areas of displacement QIPs will be implemented to mitigate tensions between host communities and the newly displaced, with a view to preventing potential conflicts. UNHCR will also undertake confidence building activities in areas of return by restoring community structures and providing targeted return assistance, including "go and see" visits.

Non Food Items

- The Office will maintain a contingency stock in order to respond rapidly to IDP needs.

- Emergency non-food items will be provided to some 22,500 families.

Shelter, Monitoring, Site Management:

Due to the magnitude of the displacement and the resulting demand on host families and communal buildings (the traditional community coping mechanism), UNHCR in coordination with other agencies has developed an emergency shelter policy which recommends the 'ladder of options' described below. The provision of emergency shelter materials to extend premises is recommended across all 'ladder options', and should be explored at each step before 'moving up the ladder' to the creation of open sites.

Emergency Shelter Assistance 'Ladder of Options':

1. Host families
The preferred option for emergency shelter is the host family arrangement. While plastic sheeting is provided to give immediate shelter, additional shelter assistance is being considered through an assessment and consultation with beneficiaries and host families.
2. Existing welfare centres and tsunami transitional shelter sites
Identify potential communal sites such as welfare centres and/or vacated or decommissioned tsunami transitional shelter sites that could accommodate additional IDPs.
3. New sites (short term): Public premises (schools, churches, temples etc)
In collaboration with local government authorities, UNHCR and humanitarian actors involved in shelter should immediately identify public buildings that will not be required in the next three to six months. These buildings can be upgraded, particularly in terms of security (electricity, security patrols or community watch programmes, water and sanitation and privacy concerns, such as partitions). Emergency shelters may be provided in the grounds where public buildings cannot accommodate all of the displaced. Short term shelter to bridge gaps may also be provided through tents.
4. New sites (medium term): Open sites with emergency shelters (tents as a last resort)
Where unused public buildings are not available or where there is insufficient space to accommodate all of the displaced in safety and dignity, and return is not foreseen in the short term, appropriate land for new shelter sites should immediately be identified and prepared.

UNHCR's funding requirements for the emergency response

In order to carry out planned activities UNHCR funding needs until 31 December 2006 amount to **USD 5,130,000**.

SECTORS AND SERVICES	TOTAL
Protection Monitoring and Coordination	1,020,000
Transport and Logistics	120,005
Domestic Needs, Household Items	1,000,300
Shelter, Infrastructure	1,856,426
Community Services	933,269
Legal Assistance/Protection	200,000
TOTAL	5,130,000

UNHCR is very grateful for the recent announcements made by the Governments of the Netherlands and Sweden for their contributions of 1 million EUR (equivalent to some USD 1.3 million) and USD 695,000, respectively. In addition, a submission of USD 2 million was made for CERF's rapid response grant, which forms part of the country team proposal.

IDP MOVEMENTS AFTER 7 APRIL 2006
as at 04 September 2006

