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20 January 2005

LKA43328.E

Sri Lanka: Update to LKA43303.E of 13 January 2005 and to LKA43290.E of 7 January 2005 on the impact of the 26 December 2004 tsunami on human rights conditions in Sri Lanka (14-20 January 2005)

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The Peace Process After the Tsunami

One news report indicated that the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), the "agency widely known as the [LTTE's] relief proxy," has taken control of relief camps and relief efforts in areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), without specifying the date when this happened (*The Times* 13 Jan. 2005). The same report also mentioned that tensions between the LTTE and the government continued (ibid.). Agence France Presse (AFP) reported that Norway is planning to send officials into Sri Lanka next week to salvage the peace process and "revive the peace negotiations" (15 Jan. 2005).

AFP reported that problems associated with the distribution of aid to LTTE-controlled areas had subsided following a meeting between the government and LTTE leaders, which was held on 13 January 2005 in Akkaraipattu (AFP 16 Jan. 2005a). The meeting was called by the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, which is headed by Norway (ibid.). According to one district director of the TRO, "[s]ince the meeting, things have been much better. ... We are now allowed into the camps and we are able to distribute food ourselves" (ibid.). However, one Tamil member of parliament indicated that discrimination and harassment of Tamils continued in some camps (ibid.). The government denied these claims (ibid.).

On 18 January 2005, it was reported that the LTTE were awaiting a reply from the government to its "overtures [which were] made through peace broker Norway to work together on tsunami relief" (AFP 18 Jan. 2005a; see also AFP 18 Jan. 2005b). Norway's "special envoy on the peace process" between the government and the LTTE arrived in Sri Lanka; this visit was a "prelude" to the arrival of Norway's Foreign Minister and International Development Minister (Xinhua 19 Jan. 2005). Norway had been attempting to revive peace talks since May 2004 (ibid.).

Although the Sri Lankan government had initially prohibited a visit by the Director of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), James T. Morris, to LTTE-controlled areas, the Associated Press (AP) reported that a meeting eventually took place with S.P. Thamilselvan, LTTE political leader in the LTTE-controlled town of Kilinochchi, but did not specify the date of this meeting (AP 16

Jan. 2005). AFP noted that the government opposed such a visit because it "feared that high-level visits could give the guerrillas de facto recognition as a separate entity" (AFP 16 Jan. 2005c). According to Morris, "no tsunami-hit area in Sri Lanka now lacks food" (AP 16 Jan. 2005).

Tensions between the LTTE and the government may have increased following an announcement made by the government on 17 January 2005 (BBC 17 Jan. 2005). The government announced that it would impose a 100-metre limit for building along the coastline in the south and west, and a 200-metre limit for building along the coastline in the LTTE-controlled areas (ibid.). The LTTE indicated that they are "not bound by government rules on building limits" (ibid.).

No other reports of developments in the relations between the LTTE and the government could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The Government and the Opposition

On 19 January 2005, government and opposition leaders launched a US \$3.5 billion rehabilitation and reconstruction plan that will involve the building of over 6,000 new homes (AP 19 Jan. 2005; DPA 19 Jan. 2005; see also AFP 18 Jan. 2005a). According to one news report, since Sri Lanka's political leaders "squabble over almost everything," the coming together of both sides to implement this plan is seen as a "historic" move (AP 19 Jan. 2005). According to Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA), the plan will span over three years and will also be implemented in LTTE-controlled areas (19 Jan. 2005). Additional information on the impact of the tsunami on the relations between the government and its opposition could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Relations Between Ethnic Groups After the Tsunami

No reports of developments in the relations between ethnic groups during the period covered by this Response could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The Situation of Women and Children After the Tsunami

On 14 January 2005, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the LTTE were recruiting children, particularly those orphaned by the tsunami, "for use as soldiers."

No additional reports of developments on the situation of women and children during the period covered by this Response could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Corruption

No reports of corruption in Sri Lanka during the period covered by this Response could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Security

On 14 January 2005, the BBC reported that there was some concern about landmines in Sri Lanka. The tsunami apparently picked up some of the landmines that had been planted around military bases of the LTTE and the government army, and scattered them throughout various coastal villages (BBC 14 Jan. 2005). While persons have been deployed to search the area and recover mines, the risk of landmine explosions continues to exist (ibid.).

On 16 January 2005, residents of one tsunami-hit village stabbed and killed a man who was suspected of stealing from tsunami victims (AFP 16 Jan. 2005b). The villagers handed over to the police six other persons suspected of theft (ibid.). On 18 January 2005, the AP reported that police had arrested two men who had stolen a gold necklace from the corpse of woman who had been killed by the tsunami. The article indicated that since the tsunami hit Sri Lanka on 26 December 2004, the police has "arrested dozens of people [for] looting damaged areas, some making off in trucks carrying refrigerators, washing machines and furniture from coastal homes and hotels hit by the tsunami" (AP 18 Jan. 2005).

Additional information on the security situation in Sri Lanka following the tsunami during the period covered by this Response could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection.

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