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3 February 2005

LKA43365.E

Sri Lanka: Update to LKA43351.E of 27 January 2005, LKA43328.E of 20 January 2005, LKA43303.E of 13 January 2005 and LKA43290.E of 7 January 2005 on the impact of the 26 December 2004 tsunami on human rights conditions in Sri Lanka (27 January 2005-2 February 2005)

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The Peace Process After the Tsunami

Over the period covered by this Response, the relations between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government appeared to have been stable. On 27 January 2005, the government reported that there was a "good working relationship" between the government and the LTTE concerning the rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the north and east of the country (Sri Lanka 27 Jan. 2005). The Colombo-based *Daily News* also quoted Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera as stating that "[t]he silver lining in the horror that was the big wave is that it brought our wounded nation together, however temporary it may be" (1 Feb. 2005a).

Discussions between the two sides have continued, and on 28 January 2005 resulted in the LTTE's agreement to a government proposal for a "three-tiered system of committees to review project proposals at the district, regional and political levels in the Tamil-dominated north and east" (AP 28 Jan. 2005a). LTTE colonel Soosai "declared that Government support was essential for the reconstruction of the tsunami hit areas in the North-East since the LTTE cannot fulfil this task on its own" (*Daily News* 1 Feb. 2005b). However, the LTTE emphasized that their discussions with the government will focus only on reconstruction and rehabilitation, and will not lead to any political negotiations (AFP 28 Jan. 2005a).

Although the government continued to maintain that the LTTE would not receive foreign aid directly, but that "all external help [will continue to] go through Colombo" instead (AFP 27 Jan. 2005b; *ibid.* 27 Jan. 2005a; see also Sri Lanka 27 Jan. 2005), on 28 January 2005, just before a meeting with government representatives, the LTTE suddenly abandoned their demands to receive foreign aid directly (AP 28 Jan. 2005a; *ibid.* 28 Jan. 2005b; *Sunday Observer* 30 Jan. 2005a). According to the LTTE negotiator, Anton Balasingham, "[t]he international community need not deliver aid direct[ly] to LTTE. ... Parochial politics is out of the equation at this hour. Realizing this, we are now engaged in discussions with the government on structuring a common strategy to ensure equitable distribution of the international aid" (AP 28 Jan. 2005a; see also *ibid.* 28 Jan. 2005b).

On 31 January 2005, representatives of both sides were scheduled to have a meeting to finalize the reconstruction and rehabilitation committees, but the meeting was terminated after members of the LTTE walked out in protest (AP 31 Jan. 2005). According to the Associated Press (AP), Wasantha Piyatissa, a member of the People's Liberation Front (JVP), "showed up uninvited" (ibid.). The JVP is a coalition partner of the ruling government and is also "known for its vociferous opposition" to the LTTE (ibid.). It is unclear whether the walkout will affect future talks between the LTTE and the government.

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

In an interview with the *Daily News*, LTTE colonel Soosai indicated that the LTTE were not recruiting tsunami-affected children as fighters and that the LTTE had in fact "'sent home the newly recruited cadres ... to look after their families'" (1 Feb. 2005b). Incidents of child recruitment by the LTTE were not reported by local or international media during the period covered by this Response.

In respect of sexual exploitation, the *Daily News* conducted interviews with various female and child survivors of the tsunami in southern and eastern Sri Lanka (2 Feb. 2005a). Some of the findings of these interviews included:

Child abuse, sexual harassment, [and] demand[s] for sexual services for tasks performed by helpers [were] commonly prevalent and increased by the day.

The signs of a sex industry for tourists seemed to be building up. Middlemen for job search agencies were procuring women for Middle East employment. The danger of exporting women had begun.

...

Adolescent schoolgirls suffered sexual harassment and other physical indignities, by rowdy youth and preying eyes. Young girls were too frightened to complain. Incidents of rape and violence were often not reported to the police.

This was due to the stigma and fear of consequences (*Daily News* 2 Feb. 2005a).

The article also noted that many women said that the police "chased [the women] away" and "did not want to believe their complaints" (ibid.). However, the Colombo-based *Sunday Observer* stated that since the tsunami struck, 160 suspects have been arrested so far on charges of theft, robbery, abduction and rape (30 Jan. 2005b).

In another article, the *Daily News* reported that women were "being robbed and raped while running for their lives" (2 Feb. 2005b). The article indicates that appropriate and timely action needs to be taken against perpetrators who target

women and "[a] proper monitoring system is also needed to track down crimes effectively" (*Daily News* 2 Feb. 2005b).

Corruption

Agence France Presse (AFP) stated that approximately 70 per cent of tsunami-affected people in areas not under LTTE control have not yet received any relief (2 Feb. 2005). According to the head of the presidential task force in charge of coordinating relief efforts, Tilak Ranavirajah, the problem has been that "our public servants have failed to deliver what the government wants given to those in need" (AFP 2 Feb. 2005). Ranavirajah promised that anyone found guilty of corruption would be punished (*ibid.*). He went on to say: "[w]e are dealing with 10 billion rupees and naturally all people will not be honest. ... There will be a certain amount of corruption, I am not trying to whitewash anyone" (*ibid.*). No further articles reporting on corruption could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Security

Information on the security situation during the period covered by this Response in addition to that which has been provided under the heading "The Situation of Women and Children After the Tsunami," 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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