TAMIL APPEAL : 18-11-2006
- TRO Vaharai Appeal

TRO is making an URGENT APPEAL to the International Humanitarian Community to intervene and avert a humanitarian crisis in Vaharai.

The International Community must pressure the Government of Sri Lanka to allow access for humanitarian agencies. Currently no food convoys have been allowed into the Vaharai area since 5th November 2006. TRO is the only organization with a continuous presence in the area and is delivering humanitarian relief (cooked meals, drinking water and temporary shelter facilities) to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The Vaharai area of Batticaloa District has been continuously bombarded by multi-barrel rockets, artillery guns, and the Sri Lanka Air Force K-fir jets since the attack 8th November 2006 on the TRO IDP Camps. The areas of Maruthankerni and Kuchankerni with large concentration of civilians (IDPs) have been bombed and shelled also.

International NGOs have been prevented from entering the Vaharai area and only very limited access has been granted to the UN and ICRC. This has resulted in the depletion of food, medicine and kerosene for cooking and lamps. No food convoy has passed through the Pannichankerni Bridge to Vaharai since 5th November which has resulted in an acute food shortage. ICRC, World Food Program (WFP) and other international NGOs have not been allowed to provide emergency food provision, non food relief items (NFRI) and shelter materials.

Only one hospital is functioning in the area, Vaharai General Hospital. This hospital only has two doctors serving a population of over 35,000 IDPs and the existing “host” population. Medicines, that were already in short supply to that hospital, are close to being exhausted due to the current embargo on food and medicinal items. The hospital does not have any stock of tetanus injections, pain medication, antibiotics or bandages to dress the wounds of civilians injured by bombing and shelling.

The IDPs are housed in basic emergency shelters covered by tarpaulins. These are not adequate due to the heavy monsoonal rains which the Northeast is currently experiencing. The huts are not able to withstand the rains but due to the embargo on the transportation of building materials to the area adequate temporary shelters can not be constructed.

All government offices are closed. They are not providing any services and no government officers or machinery are working to assist the IDPs. The allowances due to be paid to widows’ and vulnerable families have not been paid. The Government’s promise to give Rs. 15,000 as immediate assistance to the families directly affected by the recent artillery shelling in Vaharai has not been followed through on.

All schools in the area remain closed due to displacement and/or being occupied by IDPs. School children eligible to sit scholarship exams could not do so due to the recent bombing, shelling and displacement. Two children who were getting ready to go to the exam are among the 47 that were killed in the 8th November shelling.

The GCE (OL) Exam is to be held in December, but students are unable to study due to a lack of proper food and shelter and with the constant fear of being bombed, maimed or killed. Some students were seen studying under trees in an attempt to prepare for the exam.

TRO has organized a Disaster Management Committee which comprises the temple priest, Christian priest, school teacher, principal, Grama Sevaka and prominent social workers and community leaders to attempt to deal with this crisis.