

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	395
Land:	Sri Lanka
Kilde:	International displacement monitoring centre & Norwegian Refugee Council
Titel:	Sri Lanka: IDPs and returnees remain in need of protection and assistance. A profile of the internal displacement situation
Udgivet:	14. januar 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	14. april 2011

SRI LANKA:

IDPs and returnees remain in need of protection and assistance

A profile of the internal displacement situation

14 January, 2011

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OVERVIEW

IDPs and returnees remain in need of protection and assistance

In late 2010, over 320,000 people who had fled their homes due to the armed conflict before and after 2008 were estimated to remain internally displaced in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, over 190,000 IDPs had returned to their homes, but were still in need of protection and assistance.

More than 280,000 people ("new" IDPs) had fled the conflict in the northern Vanni region between April 2008 and June 2009. As of October 2010, more than 100,000 among them remained in displacement, including 26,000 people staying in temporary camps in Vavuniya and Jaffna districts, 71,000 living with host families and 1,800 in transit camps in their districts of origin. 180,000 people who had returned to their homes remained in need of protection and assistance there. In addition, 8,000 people who had been separated from the IDPs because of alleged LTTE affiliation remained in detention and had not received due process.

Among people who had been forced to flee their homes prior to April 2008 ("old" IDPs), at least 227,000 remained in displacement. More than 70,000 of them had been displaced from areas that were declared High Security Zones. Also included in the category of "old" IDPs were at least 60,000 Muslims whom the LTTE had expelled from their homes in the north in 1990 and who have since been in protracted displacement in Puttalam district. More than 14,000 had returned to their homes in the Northern Province by October 2010.

Until humanitarian clearance operations started in earnest in late 2009, the contamination of conflict-affected areas with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) was an important obstacle to IDPs' return. During 2010, lack of funding prevented clearance agencies from keeping up with the fast pace of returns since late 2009. Access to food, health services, sanitation facilities, livelihoods, education, and transport facilities was limited due to ongoing contamination with landmines and UXO of many areas surrounding return villages. In camps, sanitation was poor and there was a lack of health care and educational services. Lack of durable shelter and housing was a problem both in camps and in return areas, and there was no framework to resolve conflicting claims to the same land and property by different IDPs.

Many High Security Zones in the north and east remained in existence in spite of the defeat of the LTTE by government forces in May 2009, and people displaced from these areas had not received information as to when the military occupation of these zones would end. Military spending remained a priority in the government's budget, with only a small amount of money attributed to supporting IDPs and returnees. At the same time, humanitarian agencies providing assistance and protection were faced with funding shortages and access restrictions.

Background

Conflict and displacement

In May 2009, the 26-year-long armed conflict between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended with the military victory of the government. Between early April 2008 and June 2009, more than 280,000 people had fled from the northern LTTE-controlled areas to government-controlled territory in Vavuniya, Mannar, Jaffna and Trincomalee districts, where most of them were interned in closed military-run camps (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.10). The government asserted that this internment was necessary to screen these internally displaced people (IDPs) for affiliation with the LTTE and to demine IDPs' home areas in the north (ICG, October 2009). Only some older or otherwise vulnerable people were released before late 2009.

In December 2009, a pass system was introduced which allowed IDPs to leave closed camps such as Menik Farm for periods of up to 30 days. At the same time, large numbers of people began to be returned to their home districts prior to the presidential elections on 26 January 2010. However, many IDPs were unable to return to their homes in December 2009 and January 2010, as these were still contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Many sought shelter instead with host families and in transit camps in their home districts.

During 2010, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and humanitarian actors focused mainly on people displaced since April 2008. Among the 280,000 people displaced by the conflict between April 2008 and June 2009 ("new" IDPs), 100,000 remained in displacement as of October 2010, with 26,000 among them staying in temporary camps including Menik Farm, 71,000 living with host families, 1,800 in transit camps in their districts of origin and 1,300 in social care institutions. About 180,000 "new" IDPs had returned to their homes, but remained in need of protection and assistance there (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1).

In addition, 44,000 people had been displaced from the Vanni (the mainland area of the Northern Province covering Mannar, Mullativu and Vavuniya districts as well as most of Kilinochchi district) between 2006 and April 2008 and at least 198,000 had been displaced from across the north and east of Sri Lanka before 2006. Among these "old" IDPs, a total of more than 227,000 remained displaced as of October 2010. 10,000 had returned to their homes in the Northern Province by May 2010 and another 4,700 by October 2010, but they too had outstanding protection needs (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, pp.2,7 and 8 October 2010, p.1).

The pre-2006 IDPs included more than 70,000 people displaced because their home areas had been declared part of High Security Zones (HSZ), and at least 60,000 Muslims who were forced from their homes by the LTTE in 1990 and who have been staying in Puttalam district (Raheem, 4 November 2009; UNHCR, 31 March 2010, p.6; Raheem, 11 August 2010; NRC, 21 June 2010, p.2; GoSL, 5 December 2009). One source estimated the total number of "old" IDPs to be as high as 300,000 (Raheem, 11 August 2010).

In total, more than 327,000 people who had fled their homes due to the armed conflict before and after 2008 were still internally displaced as of October 2010. Meanwhile, more than 194,000 "old" and "new" IDPs had returned to their homes, but remained in need of protection and assistance.

Political developments

In presidential elections in January 2010, the incumbent Mahinda Rajapaksa was re-elected ahead of the challenger General Sarath Fonseka. Rajapaksa's United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) also won parliamentary elections held four months later (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.v). In September, the Sri Lankan parliament passed the 18th Amendment to the Constitution with a large majority. The Amendment allows for the president to be re-elected beyond his current second six-year term and gives him the power to appoint as well as remove members of previously independent commissions, including the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (IDSA, 7 October 2010).

In May 2010, President Rajapaksa appointed a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) to report on the armed conflict during the period from February 2002 to May 2009 (GoSL, 17 May 2010). The LLRC received criticism for its mandate, which did not include an investigation into war crimes committed by either side; for its lack of independence; and for its lack of witness protection (AI, HRW and ICG, 14 October 2010).

In June 2010, the UN Secretary-General set up a three-member expert panel "to advise [him] on Sri Lanka's efforts to address violations of international humanitarian and human rights law that may have occurred during the conflict" (UN SC, 11 November 2010, p.19). The GoSL strongly opposed the UN panel, announcing that its members would not be allowed to enter the country. A government minister led a protest demonstration outside the UN office in Colombo, and the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator was called to New York for consultations (BBC, 24 June 2010; VOA, 8 July 2010).

Protection and assistance needs of IDPs and returnees

Physical security

The contamination of land by landmines and UXO remained a threat to the physical security of returnees. In the Eastern Province, where the conflict had ended in 2007, most areas had been cleared by 2009, but some residual contamination remained (GICHD, August 2010, p.10). In the north, an area of more than 550 square kilometres (km²) was estimated to be still contaminated as of August 2010, and according to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Economic Development, it will take 15 years to clear this area (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.8; Le Temps, 18 November 2010).

Clearance operations suffered from a shortage of funds and failed to keep up with the pace of return movements from late 2009 (UN OCHA, 15 April 2010, p.2). Demining of residential areas was prioritised, and so people returned to areas where the land, streams and wells surrounding their homes were still contaminated and where agricultural activities were therefore impossible (GICHD, August 2010, p.13; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.8; CPA, September 2010, pp.10-11; UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.13). The absence of public transport services in many areas (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.6) also meant that livelihoods in more distant areas were often not accessible to them. Some returnees consciously took great risks to their own security by entering contaminated areas for livelihood purposes (IRIN, 28 October 2010).

Returnee women were exposed to particular security risks, as the absence of private toilet facilities in the return areas led them to protect their privacy by venturing into areas further away from return villages, which were more isolated and potentially contaminated with landmines and UXO (UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.5; GICHD, August 2010, p.12). The high presence of military personnel in the return areas was also perceived as a security threat by returnee women, many of whom were heads of household as they had lost their husbands in the war or because their husbands remained in detention for alleged LTTE affiliation. There were reports of gender-based violence involving military personnel in the return areas (CPA, September 2010, p.15; UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.6).

Freedom of movement

IDPs staying in camps such as Menik Farm were able to leave the camps temporarily under the pass system, but procedures were not always communicated clearly and the system was applied inconsistently between zones and camps. The validity of passes varied between one day and up to 30 days. In February 2010, the Sri Lankan authorities stated that passes were valid indefinitely, but there were subsequent reports that people had to leave a family member behind and that they could take only a limited amount of luggage when using the pass system (UN OCHA, 1 January 2010, p.4, 15 January 2010, p.5, 22 February 2010, p.5 and 21 May 2010, p.6).

During the months after the end of the conflict, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and two police investigation divisions screened the “new” IDP population and separated several thousand people from the IDPs because of their alleged association with the LTTE. The exact process of the screening remains unclear. As of September 2010, an estimated 8,000 of these “separatees” or “separated IDPs” (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.2), including “surrendeers”, were still detained, with some of them undergoing “rehabilitation”. None of the “separatees” had received due process, and the criteria for detention and release as well as the modalities of the “rehabilitation” measures remained unclear. In addition, more than 1,000 alleged former “hard-core” members of the LTTE were detained separately and were likely to be criminally prosecuted. Of these, about 700 had been sent to Olanthai detention centre by November 2010 without having received due process (Colombo Page, 23 October 2010; ICJ, September 2010, pp.5-8, 10; IDMC Interview, 29 November 2010).

Basic necessities of life

IDPs in camps received dry rations, and some reportedly sold part of their rations in order to buy fresh food as well as baby milk powder and other items not available to them otherwise. In May 2010, however, camp authorities put measures in place to prevent IDPs from selling their rations. IDPs were reportedly not allowed to bring items from outside the camp back with them into the camp, nor to take food rations outside camps in order

to sell them there and to buy complementary food with the money earned. Because they had to sell food rations inside camps to middlemen at low prices, their earnings decreased and access to complementary food became more limited (BBC, 4 May 2010; UN OCHA, 21 December 2009, p.5, 1 January 2010, p.4, 15 January 2010, p.5, 22 February 2010, p.5 and 21 May 2010, p.6; IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

Access to water in Menik Farm was limited to seven litres per person per day in early April 2010, but over the year the situation improved and in November each individual had access to between 26 and 53 litres of drinking water and between 69 and 107 litres for other purposes per day. However, in October and November 2010, IDPs in Ramavil camp still only received ten litres per person per day (UN OCHA, 15 April 2010, p.3 and 2 December 2010, pp.14-15).

Food rations for IDPs staying with host families were insufficient, and IDPs could not afford to pay for supplementary food themselves (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.6).

Returnees were eligible to receive a standard return package consisting of dry food rations for six months, supplies for shelter and non-food items and a shelter cash grant of LKR 25,000 (\$220). However, due to funding and capacity gaps, not all returnee families received this package (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.7). Many returnees had difficulty accessing livelihoods in the return areas, and those without regular income whose six-month rations had come to an end since April 2010 continued to receive rations for an additional three months as a result (UN OCHA, 31 July 2010, p.5). In November 2010, more than 280,000 IDPs and returnees in the Northern Province received food rations (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.9).

As of November 2010, there was an urgent need for shelter improvements in camps and for shelter and housing in the return areas, particularly with the beginning of the monsoon season. Shelters in camps had long passed their normal six-month lifespan and needed to be repaired or replaced, particularly in view of the monsoon season. IDPs returning in late 2009 and early 2010 had received tin sheets and cement donated by the Indian Government, but this did not suffice to cover the shelter needs of all returnees. In the return areas, more than 25,000 transitional shelters had been set up as of late October. Many returnees chose to use the shelter cash grant that was part of the return package for purposes other than shelter, including fresh food, bicycles, and tools for livelihoods. In addition, shelter assistance kits became increasingly unavailable (UN OCHA, 2 December, p.14; UNHCR, 31 March 2010, pp.3-5, 27; IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

More than 200,000 housing units destroyed by the conflict in the north and east needed repair or construction. The GoSL's North East Housing Reconstruction Program (NEHRP), which is co-financed by the International Development Association (IDA) and the European Commission (EC), will cover the reconstruction of 46,000 housing units, while an Indian-funded programme aims to rebuild 50,000 houses in north, east and central Sri Lanka. Smaller housing projects by various agencies were also under way. To receive NEHRP funding, potential beneficiaries must repair or construct the foundations of their houses with their own means; this has effectively excluded the most vulnerable among the returnees (World Bank, 22 November 2010; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.4). In the east of Sri Lanka, many beneficiaries could not afford to complete construction of houses under the NEHRP. Returnees have also reportedly tried to finance the completion of their houses by mortgaging their land, often at usurious interest rates, with many losing both their land and their house as a result (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

As of October 2010, health care services were limited in some zones of Menik Farm because of funding shortages. This particularly affected health promotion, maternal and child health, environmental health and disease surveillance (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.7). In the return areas, people living in remote areas had difficulties accessing health services, as roads were poor and transport services limited. There was a shortage of health professionals, and medical facilities lacked basic infrastructure, including communication, electricity and water supply. The situation remained difficult both in camps and in the return areas as of December (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.7; WHO, 25 September 2010, p.2; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, pp.9-10).

In temporary camps and in transit sites, sanitation and hygiene were poor. In Menik Farm, there was only one toilet for every 50 people (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.10-11 and 31 August 2010, p.1). In the return areas in

the north, many people had to defecate in the open because there were not enough toilet facilities, a situation that was expected to encourage the spread of waterborne diseases during monsoon season. Sanitation facilities also needed improvement in areas where IDPs were staying with host families (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.4 and 8 October 2010, p.11).

Land and property issues

Land and property issues have constituted another major obstacle to the sustainable return of IDPs. Most people displaced by the conflict lost documentation, including documentation related to land ownership. Others who possess permits to use state land may no longer have the documents to prove this after displacement, technically making them encroachers when they return. Damage to registry offices due to the conflict also led to loss of documentation in many cases, making it more difficult for IDPs to establish their claims to land and property. In Sri Lanka, land disputes can only be addressed through courts, with an average land case taking three to five years to resolve; courts in the northern districts of Mullaitivu and Killinochchi have been swamped with land cases (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010; UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.2; CPA, 13 May 2010, p.64).

The Prescription Ordinance, which holds that someone who has occupied a plot of private land for at least ten consecutive years becomes the owner of that land, has reportedly not been applied in times of conflict by the Northern courts. However, it also has not been formally amended to codify its non-application in times of conflict (IDMC interview, 13 December 2010; CPA, 13 May 2010, p.76).

A national restitution and compensation scheme is urgently needed, in addition to a policy to deal with conflicting claims of returnees displaced in different periods, for example to land recently cleared of landmines and UXO. The status of land “titles” distributed by the LTTE also needs to be clarified (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp. 64, 76; CPA, September 2010, pp.22-23).

Livelihoods and education

Access to livelihoods is still insufficient in the north of Sri Lanka, and so IDPs and returnees have remained dependent on assistance. Livelihood opportunities have been limited by the continuing presence of landmines and UXO and the lack of transport services from remote return areas. In addition, one case was reported in which displaced fishermen were unable to obtain a fishing license in the area they had been displaced to (CPA, September 2010, pp.10-11; UN OCHA, 21 May 2010, p.5).

In October 2010, the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation (CGR) announced that loans for livelihood projects of up to LKR 250,000 (\$2,240) were available for “separatees” who had undergone “rehabilitation”, and that IDPs who returned to their homes were eligible to apply as well (GoSL, 14 October 2010).

In Menik Farm, there was a lack of teachers. School dropout rates were high due to pupils going hungry, poor attendance by teachers and volunteer teachers lacking teaching experience. It was expected that children's education would be interrupted during the monsoon season because Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) in camps were likely to be used as rain shelters, as they had been in late 2009 and early 2010 (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.8; IDMC interview, 29 November 2010; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.5).

In the return areas, several buildings of educational institutions were used as “separatee” sites or for military purposes. As of December 2010, this was the case of Omanthai Central College and the primary section of Tamil Maha Vidyalam school in Vavuniya district, as well as the Thunukkai Zonal Education Office and the Mankulam Maha Vidyalam school in Mullaitivu district (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.8). Other school buildings were shared between a “separatee” site and a school during 2009 and 2010. As of August 2010, this was still the case for one school in Mullaitivu district. The sharing of facilities with “separatee” sites had a negative effect on children's education, with girls in particular not wanting to use the shared toilets and with facilities including water being diverted from the school to the “separatee” site (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010; UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.7).

Documentation and voter registration

Relatives of people killed in the conflict, including IDPs, were likely to have difficulties obtaining compensation and, for example, accessing inherited land. For the first 18 months after the end of the armed conflict, people were able to obtain death certificates only if they were eye witnesses to the death. Also, for political reasons linked to the GoSL's insistence that there were no civilian casualties during the final months of the armed conflict, it was expected that not many death certificates for people who died as a result of the conflict during that time would be issued (CPA, September 2010, p.9; IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

In the run-up to the presidential election in January 2010, there were concerns about the process of registering IDPs and returnees to vote. A special registration process was introduced by the Election Commission for displaced voters, but as of December 2009, many IDPs in camps and especially those living with host families reportedly had not been informed about it. Others had not applied because they were expecting to return to their home areas in time for the election. In Jaffna, people displaced before 2008 did not appear on the 2008 voters' list, which was used as the basis for the 2010 presidential election, and were therefore not eligible to vote (CMEV, 30 December 2009, pp.3-6 and 22 January 2010, p.8).

During the parliamentary elections in April 2010, it was reported that identity documents given to IDPs in camps were sometimes not sufficient to enable them to register to vote. IDPs also did not have clear information on whether they were to vote in the camps or in their district of residence (IRIN, 12 April 2010). In June 2010, IDPs in camps and many returnees had not yet been included in ongoing surveys to amend the electoral registry (The Island, 23 June 2010).

Protection issues facing people displaced before April 2008

During 2010, people displaced before April 2008 from the north and east of Sri Lanka (or "old" IDPs) have benefitted from much less protection and assistance than the "new" IDPs. There is also less interest on the part of humanitarian donors, most of whom have reportedly been "reluctant to assist persons displaced before 2008" (NRC, 21 June 2010, p.3).

The GoSL has not carried out a systematic survey of "old" IDPs about which settlement option they would prefer to pursue: to return to their place of origin (provided it is sustainable), to integrate in the place of their displacement or to resettle elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Available information suggests that many, if not most, would prefer to return. Muslim IDPs from Jaffna who are staying in Puttalam may be an exception; half of them preferred local integration and half return, according to a recent survey (NRC, 21 June 2010, p.18).

With "old" and "new" generations of IDPs returning to their homes, those displaced over a longer period are at a particular disadvantage. There is a strong need for a National Land Policy and a National Return Policy which could provide a framework for the settlement of overlapping land claims and other land issues. The participation of the different groups of IDPs as well as local communities and district and provincial authorities in such a process would be crucial.

People displaced from areas declared as High Security Zones (HSZ)

In Sampur in Trincomalee district, a High Security Zone (HSZ) has continued to prevent almost 6,000 IDPs from returning to their homes there. Most of them favour return over other settlement options, while some have chosen to be resettled in a third area. However, the land they received in compensation is of poor quality and has no access to the sea, meaning that the many fishermen resettled there could not fish (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.46, 77-78; Economist.com, 19 August 2010; The Samosa, 20 September 2010).

The Sampur HSZ partly overlaps with a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) covering 675 km² of Trincomalee district (GoSL, 12 November 2010). Inside the area covered by the HSZ and the SEZ, the Indian National Thermal Power Corporation and the Ceylon Electricity Board have planned to build a 500-megawatt coal power station.

The project, which was granted a 25-year tax exemption and concessions on customs duties, would make the return of IDPs to this particular area impossible (Express Buzz, 13 September 2010).

Unofficial HSZs such as the one in Perriyavelli GS division in Batticaloa district also continue to remain in place. The displaced from there were resettled in a third area and in May 2010 had not received any information about whether the HSZ was temporary or permanent (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.41). It was anticipated that additional HSZs may be created in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.9).

In Jaffna district, the HSZs were not officially gazetted (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.39). In January 2010, the HSZs in Chavakachcheri DS Division, Eluthumadduval and Mirusuvil were opened for the return of people displaced from there in 2006 (UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.2). Between April and October 2010, 4,700 “old” IDPs were able to return to their homes located in released areas inside a High Security Zone (HSZ) in Tellipalai DS Division in Jaffna district (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1).

However, over 60,000 “old” IDPs from Jaffna HSZ had not been able to return as of October 2010. Many of them were landless and working as casual labourers. With 95 per cent of the land in Jaffna being private and more than 190 km² of land within an HSZ, there was little state land to distribute to returnees. It was reported that these “old” IDPs often host “new” IDPs, which renders them even more vulnerable because they do not receive assistance (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

18 months after the end of the armed conflict, it remains unclear why large areas of the north and east need to remain as HSZs or otherwise occupied by the armed forces. Military occupation should be an exceptional and temporary measure, but the GoSL did not provide the displaced with sufficient information on the duration and extent of HSZs or on their plans for these areas. Where return is not possible, those displaced should receive adequate compensation (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.49-50).

Displaced northern Muslims

Muslims make up about eight per cent of the total population of more than 20 million (IRIN, 22 March 2010). Between 60,000 and 100,000 Muslims who were forced by the LTTE to leave their homes in the north of Sri Lanka in 1990 were in 2010 still living in protracted displacement in Puttalam district. In 2007, the World Bank launched a \$34-million project to facilitate the local integration of more than 7,800 displaced northern Muslim families that possessed a land title and a temporary or partly completed house in a “welfare centre”. But by June 2010, only a small minority appeared to have locally integrated in Puttalam (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.2-3).

With the end of the conflict in May 2009, return became a realistic possibility for the Puttalam IDPs. IOM provided transport to 50 returning families in November 2009, and in December 2009 the Minister of Resettlement announced that organised returns would start in earnest within the month. However, no such process happened. People did however return using their own funds. As of November 2010, the GoSL was planning to support the return of two large groups of Puttalam IDPs in the near future (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.2-3; GoSL, 5 December 2009; IDMC interview, 24 November 2010).

It was generally believed that the older generation of Muslim IDPs staying in Puttalam would tend to prefer to return, while the younger generation would tend to prefer to integrate locally. However, a recent survey conducted among Muslim IDPs from Jaffna who were staying in camps in Puttalam shows that about half prefer return and half prefer local integration, with the old and the young generations both roughly equally divided between the two options. The main reason for respondents to prefer local integration appeared to be ownership of property in Puttalam, while the main reason for preferring return was the perception of Jaffna as home (NRC, 21 June 2010, p.18).

According to the survey, the GoSL had not systematically informed Muslim IDPs staying in Puttalam about different settlement options to enable them to make an informed choice. Recent “go-and-see” visits to Jaffna were organised by the IDPs themselves or by community organisations. The GoSL had not put in place any measures

to facilitate local integration or sustainable return for this group of IDPs. Ownership of property in Puttalam may be one factor favouring local integration, but as long as IDPs do not also have access to other rights such as voting rights in the same way as the local population, they will be unable to fully integrate locally (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.6, 18-19).

Moreover, there had been no organised return movement for those who prefer that option, and IDPs returning spontaneously generally did not receive the same return package as “new” IDPs. According to unconfirmed reports, Muslim IDPs returning to Mannar received a LKR 20,000 (\$180) cash grant, while those returning to Mullaitivu received five tin sheets for shelter and those returning to Jaffna received nothing (IDMC interview, 24 November 2010). Given the difficult situation in the return areas, even for returnees from the “new” caseload who are receiving a return package, similar assistance to Muslim IDPs – as well as other “old” IDPs – would be essential if they are to achieve sustainable return and not face discrimination (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.19-20).

National and international responses and humanitarian access

Since late 2009, the speedy return of “new” IDPs to their home areas in the north of Sri Lanka has appeared to be the priority of the GoSL. However, it did not prioritise the provision of information to IDPs about the conditions in the return areas or efforts to take into account IDPs’ own preferences. The process to put in place conditions for sustainable return in the north, in particular the clearance of landmines and UXO first from residential areas and subsequently from the surrounding areas, has lagged behind the pace of returns. Landmine and UXO contamination of return areas will remain a major obstacle to the sustainability of returns in the coming months and years (IDMC interview, 5 January 2011).

The budget published by the GoSL in October 2010 allocates LKR 215 billion (\$1.9 billion) to defence and only LKR 1.7 billion (\$15 million) to return and resettlement of IDPs. Compared to the previous budget, the defence allocation has increased, while the allocation for return and resettlement has decreased. Given the widespread military presence in the north and reports on new military installations there, this seems to confirm a trend towards militarisation at the cost of the enjoyment of rights of people displaced by the conflict before and since 2008 (The Island, 25 October 2010).

IDPs’ and returnees’ access to protection and assistance was hampered by GoSL restrictions on the access of humanitarian agencies to certain areas. UN agencies needed permission from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to access the Northern Province. In 2010, they were granted access for periods from one to three months at a time. The current clearance for the UN Head of Office and field teams to access the Northern Province covers the period up to February 2011 (UN SG, 11 November 2010, p.24; UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.2 and 31 July 2010, p.2; IDMC interview, 24 November 2010).

All humanitarian projects in the return areas in the north needed approval from the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province (PTF). As of December 2010, PTF-approved projects had to be submitted to the District Coordination Committee for approval. In addition, international staff as well as vehicles needed clearance from the MoD to access the Northern Province, with access granted for three months at a time (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.2; IDMC interview, 24 November 2010; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.2).

The PTF was reportedly not transparent about the reasons for granting or denying approval. For example, most agencies providing assistance for returnees, in particular in the area of livelihoods, were denied access to the Vanni in July 2010 without reasons being given. The PTF did not grant approval to any projects focusing on issues essential for durable solutions, such as protection, gender, capacity-building, documentation, or legal assistance. No approval was granted for assessments (CPA, September 2010, pp.11-12; IDMC interviews, 24 and 29 November 2010).

The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) did not have access to most areas where IDPs and returnees were living, nor did it have access to “separates” in detention. In November 2010, the GoSL asked the

ICRC to close its offices in Jaffna and Vavuniya and to continue its operations exclusively from Colombo (CPA, September 2010, p.8; ICJ, September 2010, p.5; IRIN, 23 November 2010).

The difficult access situation complicated humanitarian agencies' planning of activities and the delivery of services to IDPs and returnees in the north. Funding shortages during 2010 may have been due to reluctance on the part of international donors to fund programmes that were dependent on short-term approval and could be called off on short notice. It was also problematic that the GoSL did not endorse the UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) for 2010 (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.41). If it expects donors to cater to the needs of IDPs and returnees, given that its own budget has made return a very low priority, the GoSL must facilitate continued access for humanitarian actors to the areas where IDPs and returnees live. This is crucial if new grievances among this population are to be avoided and if these people are to achieve durable solutions.

For the sources cited above, please see the [pdf version of the Overview](#).

CAUSES, BACKGROUND AND PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT

Overview of the causes of displacement in Sri Lanka

Background to conflict and displacement in Sri Lanka

Notes on terminology

This profile uses the term “return” to refer to the movement by displaced people back to their homes, where they lived prior to displacement. The term “resettlement”, which a number of sources use to refer to return, is not used in that sense here, because such use may lead to confusion with the term “(re)settlement elsewhere in the country”. According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GP), “resettlement” refers to displaced people’s settlement in a third place that is neither their previous home nor the location of their displacement: “[I]nternally displaced persons [should be enabled] to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to *resettle voluntarily in another part of the country*”, GP 28 (1) [emphasis added].

The term “Vanni” refers to the mainland area of the Northern Province covering Mannar, Mullativu and Vavuniya districts as well as most of Kilinochchi district. The terms “North” and “Northern Province” refer to the Vanni plus Jaffna district. The terms “East” and “Eastern Province” refer to Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara districts. “New” IDPs are people displaced by the armed conflict in Sri Lanka between 1 April 2008 and June 2009. “Old” IDPs are people displaced by the conflict before April 2008.

Background

In 1983, internal armed conflict broke out in Sri Lanka between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed group made up of ethnic Tamils who aimed at creating a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east of Sri Lanka by violent means. After Sri Lankan independence in 1948, the Tamil minority, which had played a more important role than the Sinhala ethnic majority in the British colonial administration, lost influence and was discriminated against by a series of political decisions. In 1956, Sinhala replaced English as Sri Lanka’s official language, and in 1972 the new constitution declared Buddhism – which most Sinhala adhere to – the main religion of the country (ICG, 28 November 2006, pp.2-3).

In the 1970s, several ethnic Tamil nationalist armed groups formed in Jaffna. They gained in membership and force after ethnic clashes between militant Tamils and Sinhala in the early 1980s. They received funding, weapons and training from India. In July 1983, thirteen police were killed by militant Tamils in Jaffna. Shortly after, the security forces did nothing to prevent Sinhala mobs from killing up to 1,000 Tamils. The strongest Tamil armed group, the LTTE under Vellupillai Prabhakaran, carried out attacks on members of the security forces and the government (ICG, 28 November 2006, p.3).

In 1987, India sent a peacekeeping force (Indian Peace-Keeping Force, IPKF) to the north-east of Sri Lanka to stop the fighting and to put pressure on the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to accept a certain degree of autonomy for Sri Lankan Tamils. The IPKF left in 1990 upon the request of then-President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who believed that he could reach a peace agreement with the LTTE in the near future. The LTTE left the ongoing peace negotiations, attacked security forces and politicians and conquered most of Jaffna as well as large territories in the north and east of Sri Lanka. It also eliminated the leaders of rival Tamil groups and expelled at least 60,000 Muslims from the north (ICG, 28 November 2006, pp.3-4; Raheem, 4 November 2009; BBC News, Sri Lanka Timeline, 6 October 2010).

The government's response included killings, disappearances and other human rights violations against large numbers of Tamil civilians. The LTTE started using suicide bombings and killed Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as well as Sri Lankan president Premadasa. Under then-President Chandrika Kumaratunga, whose attempt at peace negotiations soon failed, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in December 1995 took control of Jaffna. In the following years, the war between the LTTE and the SLA continued, including an LTTE attack on the Central Bank in Colombo in 1996, on the Temple of the Tooth, and important Buddhist shrine, in Kandy in 1998, an attack in 1999 in which President Kumaratunga was wounded, and the destruction of half of the Sri Lankan air fleet at Colombo's international airport in 2000. That year, the LTTE also conquered the strategic Elephant Pass, which connects the Jaffna peninsula with the mainland of Sri Lanka (ICG, 28 November 2006, pp.4-5).

In February 2002, the GoSL led by then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement (CFA) brokered by Norway. The northern Vanni region and rural areas in eastern Sri Lanka officially became LTTE-controlled, with the government keeping control of the towns of Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. In spite of the fact that the LTTE set up its own police, judiciary and bank, it was the GoSL that provided most services in the LTTE-controlled areas. More than 70 personnel from Nordic countries, forming the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), were in charge of monitoring violations of the CFA in the north and east. Soon after the CFA was signed, however, the LTTE started violating it, including through child recruitment and political killings (ICG, 28 November 2006, pp.5-6).

In April 2003, the LTTE withdrew from the peace negotiations. The ceasefire collapsed in April 2006, when ethnic riots in Trincomalee broke out in Trincomalee. A suicide bomber subsequently wounded Army Commander Sarath Fonseka at the SLA headquarters in Colombo and the Sri Lankan Air Force retaliated by bombing Sampur in eastern Sri Lanka (ICG, 28 November 2006, pp.8, 11). By July 2007, the LTTE had lost all the territory it had controlled in the east to the GoSL. The latter had the support of Vinyagamurthy Muralitharan (alias Colonel Karuna) and his Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP), an armed group later turned into a political party that had broken away from the LTTE in 2004 (ICG, 15 October 2008, p.8; ICG, 17 May 2010, p.3). In January 2008, the GoSL called off the CFA and launched a large military offensive against the LTTE in the north (BBC, Sri Lanka Timeline, 6 October 2010).

By January 2009, the SLA had taken control of Kilinochchi, which had been the administrative capital of the LTTE since 1999 (BBC, Sri Lanka Timeline, 6 October 2010). More than 300,000 civilians, most of whom had experienced multiple displacement, were trapped in the small area of the Vanni region that was still held by the LTTE, with no freedom to leave and with the LTTE forcibly recruiting people. In September 2008, all international staff of the UN and international humanitarian organisations except the ICRC had been ordered by the GoSL to leave the LTTE-held area, while some national staff stayed on (ICG, 17 May 2010, pp.3-5, 39).

Heavy fighting from January to May 2009 was accompanied by a humanitarian crisis in the Vanni and more violations of international humanitarian law committed by both sides to the conflict than ever before. The civilian population found itself inside "No Fire Zones" or "Safe Zones" that the GoSL had unilaterally declared, but where there was no safety. The SLA reportedly attacked civilians, hospitals and humanitarian operations. The LTTE was reported to kill and injure civilians, to shoot them and to force even the wounded to stay in the area of the fighting. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), "tens of thousands of non-combatant Tamil men, women, children and the elderly were killed in the final five months of the war" (ICG, 17 May 2010, pp.1, 5-6).

In mid-May 2009, the GoSL declared victory over the LTTE and stated that Prabhakaran and other senior leaders of the LTTE had been killed (AFP, 14 May 2009). Most of the more than 280,000 civilians who had fled from the LTTE-controlled area to government-controlled territory between April 2008 and June 2009 were interned in closed camps in Vavuniya, Mannar, Jaffna and Trincomalee districts that were run by the military, with more than 200,000 of them reaching the camps in April and May 2009 (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.10; ICG, 17 May 2010, p.6). The government justified internment with the need to screen these internally displaced people (IDPs) for affiliation with the LTTE and to clear IDPs' home areas in the north of landmines. Only some older and otherwise vulnerable people were released before late 2009.

On 1 December 2009, a pass system was introduced which allowed IDPs to leave closed camps such as Menik Farm for periods of up to 30 days. At the same time, large numbers of people began to be returned to their home districts prior to the presidential elections on 26 January 2010. However, many IDPs were unable to return to their actual homes in December 2009 and January 2010, as these were still contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Many sought shelter instead with host families and in transit camps in their home districts, often in difficult conditions.

In Mannar District, about 36 families living in a transit site in the Iranai Illupaikulam GN Division stated that they had not been invited to participate in “go and see” visits while staying in Menik Farm and thus had not been able to make an informed decision about whether to return. They also had not received risk education (RE) about landmines and UXO before being moved to the transit site. In Madhu DS Division, IDPs who were not able to return were living in a school where conditions were substandard. Their properties remained overgrown with jungle and could not be accessed (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.8).

In presidential elections in January 2010, the incumbent Mahinda Rajapaksa was re-elected ahead of the challenger General Sarath Fonseka. Rajapaksa's United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) also came first in parliamentary elections held four months later (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.v). In September, the Sri Lankan parliament passed the 18th Amendment to the Constitution with a large majority. The Amendment allows for the president to be re-elected beyond his current second six-year term and gives him the power to appoint as well as remove members of previously independent commissions, including the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (IDSA, 7 October 2010).

In May 2010, President Rajapaksa appointed a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) to report on the armed conflict during the period from February 2002 to May 2009 and the lessons to be learnt from the events during that period (GoSL, 17 May 2010). The LLRC received criticism for its mandate, which did not include an investigation into war crimes committed by both sides, for its lack of independence and for its lack of witness protection (AI, HRW and ICG, 14 October 2010).

In June 2010, the UN Secretary-General set up a three-member expert panel “to advise [him] on Sri Lanka's efforts to address violations of international humanitarian and human rights law that may have occurred during the conflict” (UN SC, 11 November 2010, p.19). The GoSL strongly opposed the UN panel, announcing that its members would not be allowed to enter the country. A government minister led a protest demonstration outside the UN office in Colombo, including a hunger strike, and the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator was called to New York for consultations (BBC, 24 June 2010; VOA, 8 July 2010).

IDP POPULATION FIGURES

Numbers of IDPs in Sri Lanka

Numbers of IDPs in Sri Lanka

Based on available information, IDMC estimates that as of October 2010

- **more than 327,000** people (more than 227,000 “old” and more than 100,000 “new” IDPs) remained in displacement in Sri Lanka as a result of the armed conflict that ended in May 2009 and
- **almost 195,000** people (about 180,000 “new” and almost 15,000 “old” IDPs) had returned, but remained in need of protection and assistance.

The Government of Sri Lanka and the UN stated in August 2010 that “90% of the IDPs in the North had been resettled” (Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka), 20 August 2010). This statement only includes people displaced since 1 April 2008 (also known as “new” IDPs), and it refers only to the number of “new” IDPs who *left* previously closed camps in Vavuniya, Mannar and Jaffna. It does not specify how many of them were able to *return* to their homes and how many remained in displacement outside of previously closed camps.

The fact that people have returned to their homes does not necessarily imply that they have reached a durable solution. In Sri Lanka, it appears that most returnees in the north had not reached a durable solution as of December 2010, but remained in need of assistance and protection. In the Eastern Province, more than 150,000 returnees remained vulnerable as of July 2010 (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.36).

91 per cent of the returnees in the north had been displaced multiple times since the beginning of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka in 1983 (WFP, 12 October 2010, p.6).

The main sources for internal displacement figures in Sri Lanka are government figures as published in the monthly Joint Humanitarian Updates (JHUs) and the Common Humanitarian Action Plans (CHAPs), both issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). In addition, estimates of IDPs in Sri Lanka can be found in news articles and NGO reports.

“New” IDPs (people displaced since 1 April 2008)

According to the CHAP mid-year review 2010, a total of 280,500 people were displaced between early April 2008 and June 2009 (“new” IDPs) (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.10). The government figures published in the monthly JHUs are inconsistent in that they add up to different totals of this “new” caseload (IDPs and returnees) (see Column J in the table below). This may be the result of double-counting or the inclusion of some “old” IDPs in the count.

IDMC’s estimate of the current total number of “new” IDPs in Sri Lanka is therefore based on the figure of 280,500 “new” IDPs (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.10) and the figures available for the number of people still living in displacement in temporary camps, with host families, in transit camps and in social care institutions as published in the monthly JHUs. As of October 2010, more than 26,000 people were staying in temporary camps, with the large majority staying in Menik Farm. In addition, 71,000 IDPs were staying with host families, 1,800 in transit camps in their districts of origin and 1,300 in social care institutions (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1). As a result, **more than 100,000 “new” IDPs remained in displacement as of October 2010**. Based on a total “new” caseload of 280,500 people, this means that about 180,000 people had returned to their homes, where they remained in need of protection and assistance, however. As of December 2010, the number of people in

temporary camps had decreased to just above 21,000, but no detailed figures were available for IDPs staying with host families, in social care institutions and in transit camps (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010).

90 per cent of “new” IDPs staying in camps such as Menik Farm were women (51 per cent), children under ten years of age (35 per cent) and older people (4 per cent) (UN OCHA, 31 July 2010, p.6).

Table 1: “New” IDPs

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Returnees from the “new” caseload (returned since August 2009)*	“New” IDPs in camps, in institutions and with host families	In temporary camps	In Vavuniya camps	In Mannar camps	In Jaffna camps	With host families	In social care institutions	In transit camps	Total “new” caseload	Source (Report # / Period covered)
325,820	unknown	21,332	20,153	0	1,179	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	29 / 01.04.2008-02.12.2010
230,000	100,944	26,644	25,051	0	1,593	71,200	1,300	1,800	330,944	28 / 01.04.2008-08.10.2010
216,262	110,765	34,946	32,707	0	2,239	71,264	1,267	3,288	327,027	27 / 01.04.2008-26.08.2010
183,210	127,437	40,488	38,026	0	2,462	82,644	1,267	3,038	310,647	26 / 01.04.2008-29.07.2010
142,772	158,076	64,093	60,900	0	3,193	92,791	1,192	unknown	300,848	25 / 01.04.2008-20.05.2010
119,706	171,089	76,568	73,022	185	3,361	93,329	1,192	unknown	290,795	24 / 01.04.2008-29.04.2010
112,957	175,557	82,531	78,946	185	3,400	91,834	1,192	unknown	288,514	23 / 01.04.2008-15.04.2010
104,715	175,314	81,919	78,335	184	3,400	92,203	1,192	unknown	280,029	22 / 01.04.2008-26.03.2010
91,682	186,273	92,828	88,198	1,023	3,607	92,253	1,192	unknown	277,955	21 / 01.04.2008-11.03.2010
83,720	199,101	99,066	93,926	1,533	3,607	98,843	1,192	unknown	282,821	20 / 01.04.2008-26.02.2010
75,111	201,290	101,019	95,820	1,592	3,607	99,085	1,186	unknown	276,401	19 / 01.04.2008-22.02.2010

Notes

* The total figure for the “new” caseload (Column J) has been increasing since February 2010, which may be the result of double-counting or the inclusion of some “old” IDPs in the count. The number of “new” returnees used in this profile was therefore not taken from Column A, but calculated by deducting the number of people still displaced as of October 2010 (over 100,000) from the total figure for the “new” caseload provided in the 2010 CHAP mid-year review (280,500), which yields about 180,000.

A Number of returnees (‘new’ caseload)

B C + G + H + I; where the number of IDPs in transit camps is unknown, the figure provided in column B is likely lower than the real value.

C Number of ‘new’ IDPs in temporary camps (D + E + F)

G Number of ‘new’ IDPs with host families in their districts of origin

H Number of IDPs in social care institutions

I Number of ‘new’ IDPs in transit camps in their districts of origin

J People who were forced to flee their homes between April 2008 and June 2009; where the number of IDPs in transit camps is unknown, the figure provided in column J is likely lower than the real value.

K UN OCHA, North East Joint Humanitarian Updates #19-29 (based on government figures)

“Old” IDPs (people displaced before April 2008)

In addition to the “new” IDPs, there were more than 227,000 “old” IDPs in Sri Lanka as of October 2010. “Old” IDPs consist of two groups:

- 44,000 people as of late December 2009 who had been displaced from the Vanni between 2006 and April 2008, and

- 198,000 people as of late December 2009 who had been displaced from across the north and east of Sri Lanka before 2006 (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, pp.2, 7).

10,000 among the "old" IDPs had returned to their homes in the Northern Province by May 2010 and another 4,700 by October 2010. The 4,700, who had returned to Tellipalai DS Division, had been part of a total of 65,500 people who had been displaced from HSZ in Jaffna district before April 2006. As of October 2010, the remaining 60,800 "old" Jaffna IDPs were staying in 60 IDP camps in Jaffna district (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, pp.2, 7; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1).

The pre-2006 IDPs included a total of more than 70,000 people displaced because their home areas had been declared part of High Security Zones (HSZ), and between 60,000 and 100,000 Muslims who were forced from their homes by the LTTE in 1990 and who have been staying in Puttalam district (Raheem, 4 November 2009; UNHCR, 31 March 2010, p.6; NRC, 21 June 2010, p.2; GoSL, 5 December 2009). One source estimated the total number of "old" IDPs to be as high as 300,000 (Raheem, 11 August 2010).

Table 2: "Old" IDPs

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Total "old" caseload	Returnees among the "old" caseload	"Old" IDPs still in displacement (as of December 2010)	Displaced from the Vanni during 2006-April 2008	Northern Muslims (displaced before 2006)	Displaced from High Security Zones (HSZ) (displaced before 2006)	Remaining "old" IDPs still in displacement	Sources
242,000 to 300,000	10,000 returned from Jan-May 2010; 4,700 from the Tellipalai HSZ in Jaffna returned from April-Oct 2010	227,300	44,000	60,000-100,000	more than 70,000 (including 65,500 displaced from HSZ in Jaffna)	unknown	UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1; UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, pp.2, 7; Raheem, 11 August 2010; Raheem, 4 November 2009; UNHCR, 31 March 2010, p.6; NRC, 21 June 2010, p.2; GoSL, 5 December 2009

Notes

Figures are approximate. Figures in bold are used to calculate totals.

A Estimations of the number of people displaced before April 2008 ($B + C = D + E + F + G$)

B It is assumed here that the 10,000 returning IDPs and the 4,700 belong to different groups.

G Estimations under D, E and F concern only some sub-groups of "old" IDPs and therefore do not add up to the total figure under A.

DISPLACEMENT BEFORE APRIL 2008

General

During 2010, people displaced before April 2008 from the north and east of Sri Lanka (or “old” IDPs) have benefitted from much less protection and assistance than the “new” IDPs. There is also less interest on the part of humanitarian donors, most of whom have reportedly been “reluctant to assist persons displaced before 2008” (NRC, 21 June 2010, p.3). As of October 2010, there were at least 227,000 “old” IDPs in Sri Lanka. In addition, 10,000 had gone back to their homes by May 2010 and another 4,700 by October 2010, but remained in need of protection and assistance there (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, pp.2, 7; Raheem, 11 August 2010; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1).

The GoSL has not carried out a systematic survey of “old” IDPs about which settlement option they would prefer to pursue: to return to their place of origin (provided it is sustainable), to integrate in the place of their displacement or to resettle elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Available information suggests that many, if not most, would prefer to return. Muslim IDPs from Jaffna who are staying in Puttalam may be an exception; half of them preferred local integration and half return, according to a recent survey (NRC, 21 June 2010, p.18).

With “old” and “new” generations of IDPs returning to their homes, the long-term displaced are at a particular disadvantage. There is a strong need for a National Land Policy and a National Return Policy which could provide a framework for the settlement of overlapping land claims and other land issues. The participation of the different groups of IDPs as well as local communities and district and provincial authorities in such a process would be crucial.

Displacement from areas declared as High Security Zones

High Security Zones (HSZ) are areas in the north and east of Sri Lanka that are under the control of the SLA and from which the civilian population was evicted. Some of them are officially gazetted, while others were set up in an ad-hoc manner. The issue of HSZ and returns of IDPs had already come up during the negotiations between the LTTE and the GoSL after the 2002 ceasefire agreement (CFA), when the LTTE did everything to increase its control over the north and east and to that end advocated for the return of IDPs to HSZ. However, the LTTE rejected international proposals for a gradual return process to HSZ during which it would have had to give up some of its heavy weapons (ICG, 28 November 2006, p.7).

However, 18 months after the end of the armed conflict, it remains unclear why large areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka need to remain as HSZs or otherwise occupied by the armed forces. Military occupation should be an exceptional and temporary measure, but the GoSL did not provide the displaced with sufficient information on the duration and extent of HSZs or on their plans for these areas. Where return is not possible, those displaced should receive adequate compensation (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.49-50).

As of October 2010, HSZ continued to exist in Shanthapuram and Indupuram (Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts), Silvathurai and Mullikulam (Puttalam and Mannar districts), Sampur (Trincomalee district) and in ad hoc locations (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.8). 60,000 people remain displaced from HSZ in Jaffna alone (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.1).

The Sampur HSZ in Trincomalee district was set up by the GoSL on 30 May 2007 (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.39-40; ICG, 15 October 2008, p.25). It partly overlaps with a Special Economic Zone covering 675 km² of Trincomalee district, which had been declared under the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka (BOI) Act in February 2006 (GoSL, 12 November 2010). The GoSL acquired the land for the HSZ under the Land Acquisition Act, but it was reported

that many of those displaced had not been informed about the process in accordance with the Act. As of August 2010, almost 6,000 people displaced from the area of the HSZ had not been able to return to their homes there. Most of them favour return over other settlement options, while some have chosen to be resettled in a third area. However, the land they received in compensation is of poor quality and has no access to the sea, meaning that the many fishermen resettled there could not fish (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.46, 77-78; Economist.com, 19 August 2010; The Samosa, 20 September 2010).

Inside the area covered by the HSZ and the SEZ, a 500-megawatt power station fuelled by coal and taking up almost 7 km² was to be constructed as a joint venture between the Indian National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) and the Ceylon Electricity Board, but construction had been delayed. In September 2010, the GoSL granted the project a 25-year tax exemption and concessions on customs duties. The project would make the return of IDPs to this particular area impossible (Express Buzz, 13 September 2010). Of the remaining area of the HSZ, part of Kattakarichchenai was opened for return and a little over 1.6 km² were opened for cultivation prior to the presidential election in January 2010. Before the parliamentary election in April 2010, the GoSL organised a go-and-see visit to Kalli Kovil for IDPs from there and granted permission to fish in the areas adjoining the HSZ (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.46).

Unofficial HSZs such as the one in Perriyavelli GS division in Batticaloa district also continue to remain in place. The displaced from there were resettled in a third area and in May 2010 had not received any information about whether the HSZ was temporary or permanent (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.41). It was anticipated that additional HSZs may be created in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.9).

In Jaffna district, the HSZs were not officially gazetted (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.39). In January 2010, the HSZs in Chavakachcheri DS Division, Eluthumadduval and Mirusuvil were opened for the return of people displaced from there in 2006 (UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.2). As of October 2010, 60,800 "old" IDPs from Jaffna HSZ had not been able to return and remained in need of protection and assistance. Many of them were landless and working as casual labourers. With 95 per cent of the land in Jaffna being private and more than 190 km² of land within an HSZ, there is little state land to distribute to returnees. These "old" IDPs often host "new" IDPs, which renders them even more vulnerable because they do not receive assistance (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

Displacement of northern Muslims

Muslims make up about eight per cent of the total population of 20.2 million (IRIN, 22 March 2010). Between 60,000 and 100,000 Muslims who were forced by the LTTE to leave their homes in the north of Sri Lanka in 1990 were in 2010 still living in protracted displacement in Puttalam district. In 2007, the World Bank launched a \$34-million World Bank project to facilitate local integration of more than 7,800 displaced northern Muslim families that possessed a land title and a temporary or partly completed house in a "welfare centre". But by June 2010, only a small minority appeared to have locally integrated in Puttalam (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.2-3).

With the end of the conflict in May 2009, return became a realistic possibility for these IDPs. However, in spite of the announcement by the Minister of Resettlement in December 2009 that organised returns of the Puttalam Muslim IDPs would start during the same month, no such organised return happened, with the exception of IOM providing transport to 50 returning families in November 2009. People did however return using their own funds. As of November 2010, the GoSL was planning to support the return of two large groups of Puttalam IDPs in the near future (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.2-3; GoSL, 5 December 2009; IDMC interview, 24 November 2010).

It was generally believed that the older generation of Muslim IDPs staying in Puttalam would tend to prefer return, while the younger generation would tend to prefer local integration. However, a recent survey conducted among Muslim IDPs from Jaffna who were staying in camps in Puttalam shows that about half prefer return and half prefer local integration, with the old and the young generation both roughly equally divided between the two options. The main reason for respondents to prefer local integration appeared to be ownership of property in

Puttalam, while the main reason for preferring return was the perception of Jaffna as home (NRC, 21 June 2010, p.18).

According to the survey, the GoSL had not systematically informed Muslim IDPs staying in Puttalam about different settlement options to enable them to make an informed choice. Recent “go-and-see” visits to Jaffna were organised by the IDPs themselves or by community organisations. The GoSL had not put in place any measures to facilitate local integration or sustainable return for this group of IDPs. Ownership of property in Puttalam may be one factor favouring local integration, but as long as IDPs do not also have access to other rights such as voting rights in the same way as the local population, they will be unable to fully integrate locally (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.6, 18-19).

Moreover, there had been no organised return movement for those who prefer that option, and IDPs returning spontaneously generally did not receive the same return package as “new” IDPs. According to unconfirmed reports, Muslim IDPs returning to Mannar received a LKR 20,000 (\$180) cash grant, while those returning to Mullaitivu received five tin sheets for shelter and those returning to Jaffna received nothing (IDMC interview, 24 November 2010). Given the difficult situation in the return areas, even for returning “new” IDPs receiving a return package, such assistance would be essential to Muslim IDPs – as well as other “old” IDPs – for them to achieve sustainable return and not face discrimination (NRC, 21 June 2010, pp.19-20).

PHYSICAL SECURITY AND INTEGRITY

Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO)

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GP) refer to every human being's right to life (GP 10) and to physical, mental and moral integrity (GP 11). The contamination of return areas with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) of large areas in the north and east of Sri Lanka has endangered the physical security and integrity of IDPs during their flight from the fighting as well as during and after return. Anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines laid by both the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but also unexploded ordnance (UXO) and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO) used by both parties to the conflict had been an important obstacle to IDPs' return until humanitarian clearance operations started in earnest in late 2009. They have been a major obstacle to making return sustainable throughout 2010, and will continue to be one in the coming months and years (ICBL, 18 October 2010; IDMC interview, 5 January 2011).

The following among Sri Lanka's districts were or have been contaminated due to the conflict: Ampara, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullativu, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee and Vavuniya (UNDP, 20 October 2010). In the east, where the conflict had ended in July 2007, most areas had been cleared by 2009, but some residual contamination remained (GICHD, August 2010, p.10). In the north, demining and clearance were slow to begin after the end of the conflict in May 2009. Only very few demining agencies had gained access to the Vanni region by September 2009, and significant funding was only made available once returns had begun in earnest and more access was granted to demining agencies towards the end of 2009 (ICBL, 18 October 2010).

In Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar districts, it was estimated that more than 550 km² remained contaminated as of late August 2010, while more than 430 km² had been cleared in these districts since January 2009 (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.8; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.12). More than 20 areas in Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya districts had not been assessed, as the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) had not opened them to mine clearance agencies. In Jaffna district, the contaminated area included more than 3 km² of minefields and more than 17 km² of UXO-contaminated land as of July 2010 (ICBL, 18 October 2010). By late November 2010, an additional 536 km² of mine- and UXO-contaminated land in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar districts had been identified through surveys (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.12). There was particular concern about UXO contamination since non-technical surveys include landmines, but not UXO (IDMC interview, 13 December 2010).

Since late 2009 and prior to the presidential elections in January 2010, large numbers of displaced people started being released from closed camps and returned to their districts of origin. Many did not have sufficient information about the areas they were returning to, and conditions for sustainable return were not in place (CPA, September 2010, p.10). According to a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) dated January 2010, IDPs were initially returned to areas still contaminated with landmines and UXO. They were not informed about the fact that return areas had not yet been declared demined according to humanitarian standards and were therefore unable to make a voluntary choice about whether they should return at this early stage. The absence of UNDP's humanitarian demining certification for these areas also meant that no humanitarian agencies were yet present there, effectively putting returnees out of reach of protection and assistance including health services, which are essential in cases of mine injury (ICG, 11 January 2010, p.4).

Due to the fast pace of returns since late 2009 and limited resources, the Government of Sri Lanka and clearance operators prioritised clearance of residential areas, which remained a priority in most districts as of December 2010, with clearance of land for livelihoods lately becoming a priority in Mannar and Vavuniya districts. This meant that IDPs returned to areas that were surrounded by contaminated land, streams and wells, which could not be used for livelihood purposes. Livelihoods in areas further away often remained inaccessible due to a lack

of public transport facilities. Many returnees thus remained dependent on aid (UN OCHA, 15 April 2010, p.2; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.12; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.8; UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, pp.6, 8; UN OCHA, 22 February 2010, p.2; CPA, September 2010, pp.10-11).

Many returnees appear to have participated in risk education programmes and have been well aware of the risks associated with landmines and UXO and of the locations of non-cleared areas. However, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was concerned that not all IDPs had received risk education before return. In addition, there was a lack of victim assistance programmes (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.4). During 2009, more than 250,000 people including IDPs – most of them staying in Menik Farm, but also some staying elsewhere in Vavuniya, Mannar and Jaffna – received risk education (RE) on landmines and UXO. More than 114,000 IDPs benefited from an emergency RE programme carried out by UNICEF upon request by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) between late October 2009 and the end of January 2010 (ICBL, 18 October 2010). Between January and November 2010, more than 360,000 people in the north, including returnees, received risk education (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.13).

Because of the need to secure livelihoods, some returnees consciously took risks to their physical security by venturing into uncleared areas for this purpose (IRIN, 28 October 2010). Others have taken such risks in order to assert ownership of their land and other property. This was the case for twelve families who returned to their homes in an uncleared area in Karachchi DS division in Kilinochchi district and were subsequently transferred out of that area in order to prevent injuries (UN OCHA, 29 April 2010, p.2). In Manthai West in Mannar district, several families returned to their homes for similar reasons before the area had completely been cleared (UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.5).

Returnee women were particularly vulnerable to mine injuries as they are often responsible for the collection of firewood, the rearing of cattle and other activities that oblige them to venture into potentially contaminated areas (UNDP-MDTF, 18 January 2010, p.5). On the other hand, there were more mine- and UXO-related casualties among men and boys than among women and girls (UNICEF, 13 November 2010). Children were also at a high risk of injury and death due to landmines and UXO (CRC, 19 October 2010, p.4).

Given the extent of the mine and UXO contamination in the north of Sri Lanka, clearance operations are likely to continue for years during and after returns. According to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Economic Development, clearance will take 15 years (Le Temps, 18 November 2010). Assessment of the contamination of non-residential areas has relied a lot on non-technical surveys among returnees, who are likely to have the most detailed knowledge about landmines and UXO in the areas surrounding their homes (ICBL, 18 October 2010). Between January and October 2010, locals including returnees had reported more than 470 suspected landmines and UXO, according to UNICEF (IRIN, 28 October 2010).

As of October 2010, there remained a funding gap of USD 6.5 million for demining for 2010 (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.8). The IDPs from Mullaitivu district who were still staying in Menik Farm could not return because their home areas, especially in Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) and Madhu DS Divisions, were still contaminated with landmines and UXO and clearance was complicated in these areas. There and elsewhere in Mullaitivu district, non-technical surveys had not yet started as of October 2010 (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.1–2, 8). In other areas, the pace of returns was faster than that of clearance operations, resulting in security risks for returnees (AFP, 5 October 2010).

Publication of Sri Lanka's updated National Mine Action Strategy, which was to deal with mine and UXO contamination in Sri Lanka, risk education (RE), and victim assistance, was pending in early January 2011.

Women and Girls

There were many female-headed households (FHH) among returnees because male heads of households had died during the conflict or were being held in detention in "separatee" sites. Returnee women heading their

households were afraid for their security and some of them spent the nights with other families in order to be safe. The absence of private toilet facilities in the return areas led them to protect their privacy by venturing into areas further away from return villages, which were more isolated and potentially contaminated with landmines and UXO (UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.5; GICHD, August 2010, p.12).

Another concern among returning FHH was the high presence of military personnel in close proximity to residential areas, and there were reports of gender-based violence (GBV) in the return areas. One case, the rape of two women by four soldiers in Vishvamadu in Mullaitivu district in June 2010, was taken up by local media and the perpetrators were taken into custody by the Kilinochchi magistrate (CPA, September 2010, p.15; UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.6).

Liberty and freedom of movement

Guiding Principle 12 states that “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention”, and GP 14 refers to the right to liberty of movement of every IDP. In Sri Lanka, however, the freedom of movement of IDPs in camps remained limited, although less so at the end of 2010 than in the beginning of the year. There were also some limitations to the free movement of returnees. In addition, up to 8,000 “separatees” remained in detention without due process.

IDPs in camps

Until the end of November 2009, the large majority of the Vanni IDPs were interned in closed camps including Menik Farm and had no freedom of movement. The GoSL justified internment with the need to screen IDPs for potential affiliation with the LTTE and to demine IDP’s areas of origin. Only the most vulnerable among them (pregnant women, people with disabilities, older people) were released. Large numbers of people began to be released from the camps only since October 2009.

On 1 December 2009, a pass system for IDPs staying in camps was introduced, enabling them to leave the camps for certain periods of time (ICG, 11 January 2010, p.3). However, there was a lack of information about the functioning of the pass system (UN OCHA, 15 April 2010, p.4), and procedures varied between camps such as Menik Farm and between different zones of camps. In December 2009, IDPs were not allowed to visit family and friends staying inside other zones of camps, but had to meet them in the visitors’ areas, which meant that they could only speak to them through barbed wire (UN OCHA, 21 December 2009, p.5). In some cases, the details of the implementation of the pass system “seem[...] to be simply left to the discretion of the respective Zone Commander” (UN OCHA, 1 January 2010, p.4), with some passes valid for only one day, others for seven days and yet others for 30 days (UN OCHA, 1 January 2010, p.4; UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.5). While authorities stated in February 2010 that people could leave the camps under the pass system for an unlimited period of time, the fact that notifications about returns were made only shortly before the start of return movements in practice restricted the time that IDPs would spend outside of camps under the pass system (UN OCHA, 22 February 2010, pp.5-6).

There were reports that some IDPs were denied passes because they were allegedly associated with the LTTE (ICG, 11 January 2010, p.3). In some zones, IDPs using passes were reportedly prohibited from bringing items obtained or received outside Menik Farm back with them into the camp (UN OCHA, 21 December 2009, p.5). As of February 2010, people leaving camps under the pass system could only take a limited amount of luggage with them, and as of May 2010, people wanting to leave Zone 2 of Menik Farm under the pass system had to leave one family member behind in the camp (UN OCHA, 22 February 2010, p.5; UN OCHA, 21 May 2010, p.6). Camp authorities in some zones required that the application form be filled out in English, a language not accessible to many IDPs (UN OCHA, 31 July 2010, p.6).

Returnees

In the return areas, people's freedom of movement was restricted due to ongoing mine and UXO clearance and instructions issued by the SLA (UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.5).

The situation of "separatees"

"Separatees" or "separated IDPs" (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.2) are people who were separated from the Vanni IDPs by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) as well as the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) and the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of the police during several months after the end of the conflict in May 2009. They have since been detained under emergency and counter-terrorism legislation on account of their alleged affiliation with the LTTE. The criteria for selecting the "separatees" remained unclear. Of the 12,000 original "separatees", it is estimated that up to 8,000 remained in detention as of September 2010. As of September 2010, none of the "separatees" had received due process (ICJ, September 2010, pp.5-8, 10), but as of late October 2010, the GoSL had "decided to indict some 1,000 former LTTE cadres" who "are being held on charges of their involvement in terrorism" (Colombo Page, 23 October 2010). The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) refers to at least 1,300 alleged former "hard-core" LTTE cadres who have been detained separately and are likely to come under criminal prosecution (ICJ, September 2010, p.10). Of these, about 700 had been sent to Olanthai detention centre by November 2010 without having received due process (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

According to the International Commission of Jurists,

"Prolonged and indefinite administrative detention of 'rehabilitees' for up to two years without charge may amount to individual and collective punishment without charge or trial. In addition to this disguised form of punishment for alleged criminal offences, 'rehabilitees' face the prospect of a second punishment upon conviction for crimes if criminal prosecutions are eventually initiated. [...] [D]etainees [may also be] vulnerable to the violation of other rights, including the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the prohibition against enforced disappearance, as well as of a number of particular rights applicable to children" (ICJ, September 2010, p.7).

A National Action Plan for the Reintegration of Ex-combatants, developed by the Ministry of Human Rights and Disaster Management with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), had not been implemented as of October 2010. Meanwhile, the ongoing "separatee" and "rehabilitation" process appeared to be *ad hoc* and lacking transparency, in addition to being problematic from the point of view of international law (Groundviews, 19 October 2010).

Beyond the separate detention of alleged former "hard-core" LTTE cadres, the screening process and the subsequent detention of "separatees" reportedly did not differentiate between different levels of involvement with the LTTE. The detained "separatees" include not only long-time LTTE combatants, but also people recruited during the last stages of the conflict and non-combatants associated with the LTTE. They were not individually informed about why they were being detained, and those who were released in January 2010 were not informed about the reasons for their release (ICJ, September 2010, pp.8-9, 11).

As of July 2010, there were about twelve "separatee" sites or "Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres" (PARC), many of them in buildings of educational institutions in the Northern Province. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka did not have access to the "separatee" sites. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did have some access to them, but only until July 2009. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) was carrying out a socio-economic profiling of "separatees" in the context of "rehabilitation" programmes, but there was a danger that the information gathered might be used against "separatees", given the lack of transparency and legally problematic nature of the "separatee" process (ICJ, September 2010, pp.11-12, 15; Danish Immigration Service, October 2010, p.16).

About one third of the "separatees" were participating in "rehabilitation" programmes, which included vocational training, secondary education and Buddhist meditation. Programmes varied across "separatee" sites. It remained unclear whether "separatees" participated voluntarily in these "rehabilitation" programmes, but involuntary "rehabilitation" without prior criminal conviction would violate international standards. The criteria for determining

the duration of “rehabilitation” programmes were also unknown, with “separatees” being released at different stages. Those still in detention and undergoing “rehabilitation” had not been informed about the date of their release (ICJ, September 2010, pp.12, 30).

BASIC NECESSITIES OF LIFE

Food and water

According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IDPs have the right to an “adequate standard of living” (GP 18 (1)) and should have access to “essential food and potable water” (GP 18 (2a)). Access to these rights remained limited for many IDPs and returnees in Sri Lanka.

Food

IDPs staying in camps were receiving 450 grams of rice, 60 grams of lentils, 20 grams of oil, 20 grams of sugar and 5 grams of salt per person in daily food rations provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.4). In Menik Farm, more than 9,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, children younger than five and older people received supplementary food in April 2010 (UN OCHA, 29 April 2010, p.4). The same was the case for undernourished children in Jaffna district, including those staying in Ramavil camp (UN OCHA, 26 March 2010, p.3).

In order to buy a larger variety of fresh food, infant milk powder and other items that were not accessible to them otherwise, camp residents sold dry food rations. In May 2010, however, camp authorities put measures in place to prevent IDPs from selling their rations. IDPs were reportedly not allowed to bring items from outside the camp back with them into the camp, nor to take food rations outside camps in order to sell them there and to buy complementary food with the money earned. Because they had to sell food rations inside camps to middlemen at low prices, their earnings decreased and access to complementary food became more limited (BBC, 4 May 2010; UN OCHA, 21 December 2009, p.5; UN OCHA, 1 January 2010, p.4; UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.5; UN OCHA, 22 February 2010, p.5; UN OCHA, 21 May 2010, p.6; IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

Problems with access to food were also due to limited livelihood opportunities. For example, IDPs staying with host families in Jaffna earned LKR 6,000 (USD 54) per month on average, but spending was LKR 9,000 (USD 80), half of which was used to buy food items to complement rations provided by WFP. People tried to cope with this situation by borrowing money, skipping meals, eating less, eating less expensive food, and selling their own jewellery and agricultural products (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.6).

For the first six months after return, returnees received food rations distributed through Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies (MPCS). By April 2010, several groups of returnees had reached the end of the six-month period. Many of them were not able to access a regular income, which would have enabled them to buy their own food. These people received rations for an additional three months (UN OCHA, 31 July 2010, p.5; UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.4).

Agricultural activity, which would help address problems of food access, remained limited in the northern return areas. As of July 2010, only 7,200 out of a total of 149,000 acres of *padi* (rice) had been cultivated, in addition to 7,000 out of 32,000 acres of other field crops and 2,500 out of 10,000 acres of vegetables. Fields remained inaccessible due to contamination with landmines and UXO, and many irrigation systems had not been made functional. The fishing and livestock sectors also needed assistance (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, pp.35-36).

Water

As of December 2010, each displaced person staying in Menik Farm had access to between 26 and 53 litres of drinking water and between 69 and 107 litres of water for other purposes, which was well above Sphere standards (7.5 to 15 litres per person per day for drinking, basic hygiene practices and basic cooking purposes) (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, pp.14-15). This was a clear improvement over the situation in early April 2010, when just above 7 litres of water were available per person per day on average, with some people having access

to less (UN OCHA, 15 April 2010, p.3). People staying in Ramavil camp in Jaffna had access to 10 litres per person per day as of December 2010. A gap in the provision of water in mobile tanks was anticipated for late 2010 in Ramavil camp and for early 2011 in Menik Farm (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.10-11; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, pp.14-15).

Shelter and housing

GP 18 (2b) states that IDPs shall be provided with basic shelter and housing by the competent authorities, and Principle 8 of the Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (“Pinheiro Principles”) provides that “everyone has the right to adequate housing” (8.1) and that “States should adopt positive measures aimed at alleviating the situation of [...] displaced persons living in inadequate housing” (8.2). As of November 2010, many IDPs and returnees in Sri Lanka lacked durable shelter and adequate housing.

Shelter

Shelters in Menik Farm needed urgent repair as they had been used much longer than their normal life span, which was all the more problematic in view of the monsoon season. The tents were too severely deteriorated to be restored. There was a lack of capacity and funding to carry out those repairs (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.9; UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.7; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.13).

In the northern return areas, there was an urgent need for shelter, especially in view of the monsoon season, because large numbers of housing units had been destroyed and not yet reconstructed. As of late October 2010, more than 25,000 transitional shelters had been set up. There was a lack of capacity and building material, and not all areas could be accessed by agencies providing shelter assistance. There were also difficulties with the selection of beneficiaries, with some households receiving shelter assistance as well as permanent housing and others neither of the two (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.14; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.1, 2, 8, 9).

Between October 2009 and October 2010, more than 61,000 returnee families in Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Jaffna districts had registered with UNHCR and local authorities to receive a shelter grant of LKR 25,000 (USD 220) in cash. More than 11,000 families had not received the grant by 25 October 2010. Many returnees chose to use the grant for purposes other than shelter, including purchase of fresh food, clothes, bicycles, tools for livelihoods, and investment in small businesses. In addition, returnees received corrugated tin sheets, tarpaulins, rope, and timber, which covered their initial – but not their longer-term – shelter needs (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.13; UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.1; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.9; UNHCR, March 2010, pp.3-5, 27-29).

Housing

The existing two large initiatives on housing together aim at rebuilding and constructing less than 100,000 housing units in north, east and central Sri Lanka. The actual need for housing reconstruction in the north and east alone likely far exceeds 200,000 housing units: As of November 2010, more than 200,000 housing units destroyed before 2002 and more than 23,000 housing units destroyed in 2006 needed rebuilding (World Bank, 10 November 2010). This was in addition to those units that were destroyed between 2006 and 2009, the number of which had not been made public as of 6 January 2011 (World Bank, 7 January 2011). In the Vanni alone, more than 230,000 units were estimated to have been damaged or destroyed due to the conflict (UN OCHA, 22 February 2010, p.2).

The first initiative, the GoSL’s North East Housing Reconstruction Program (NEHRP), was initiated already in 2004. It has been financed jointly by the International Development Association (IDA), the European Commission (EC) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and will cover the reconstruction of 46,000 war-destroyed housing units in the north and east of Sri Lanka (World Bank, 22 November 2010). The programme estimates the cost of a permanent house to be LKR 325,000 (USD 2,900), while project partners recently estimated it to be up to LKR

519,000 (USD 4,600) due to the fact that prices for building material are on the rise in the north and east of Sri Lanka (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.4).

NEHRP consists of cash assistance to beneficiaries for housing construction purposes under a so-called owner-driven construction process. The programme is reportedly targeting the most vulnerable households (World Bank, 10 November 2010). However, beneficiaries receive the first of five cash instalments only after they have completed repair/construction of the foundation of their house on their own (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.4). Many IDPs and returnees lack livelihood options and financial means and it is unlikely that the most vulnerable among them will be able to meet this precondition on their own, effectively making them ineligible for the NEHRP in its current form.

The second initiative, an Indian-funded programme for the construction of 50,000 houses in north, east and central Sri Lanka, was scheduled to begin in October 2010 with a pilot project to construct 1,000 houses. The programme is intended to give priority to those most at risk, i.e. widows, female-headed households and families with many dependents, among others. Indian companies will be involved in the construction of the houses (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.4).

In addition, as of 20 November 5,714 of 14,254 pledged permanent housing units funded by international donors had been constructed in the Vanni, and 1,889 of 3,010 pledged units had been repaired (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.7).

Health, nutrition and sanitation

Guiding Principle 18 (2d) stipulates that “competent authorities shall provide internally displaced persons with and ensure safe access to: [...] Essential medical services and sanitation”, and GP 19 (1) provides that wounded and sick IDPs and those with disabilities shall receive “the medical care and attention they require”. They shall also have access to psychological and social services when necessary. In Sri Lanka, IDPs’ and returnees’ access to medical services was complicated as the number of health professionals in camps and return areas was insufficient and as medical infrastructure was lacking. Children in conflict-affected areas were suffering from malnutrition, and sanitation was an issue in camps and return areas.

Health

One Primary Health Care Centre (PHCC) in Menik Farm provided outpatient and emergency medical care to 400 patients a day as of October 2010. 41 medical doctors, of whom 20 were commuting between the camp and the return areas, and 20 nurses were working in Menik Farm as of September 2010. Specialised health care was being provided at Cheddikulam Base Hospital and Vavuniya General Hospital, and a monthly polyclinic in each zone of Menik Farm was providing pre- and postnatal care and family planning and child welfare services, including vaccination. IDPs staying in Menik Farm also sought medical treatment outside of the camp using the pass system (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.6-7; WHO, 25 September 2010, p.1).

When there was an outbreak of mumps in Menik Farm in April 2010, only just above 70 out of 300 patients went to Poovarasankulam isolation hospital for treatment. The other patients stated that they chose not to go, as they did not want to be separated from their families. Other patients avoided the hospital because were afraid to miss opportunities to return to their home areas (UN OCHA, 29 April 2010, p.5; UN OCHA, 15 April 2010, p.3).

As of October 2010, health services in Zones 2 and 4 of Menik Farm had decreased due to lack of funds, and health promotion, maternal and child health, environmental health and disease surveillance were particularly affected. Between mid-August and mid-September, there were more than 200 cases of diarrhoea reported in Menik Farm, in addition to one case of mumps, one of dengue and one of chickenpox. More and more health professionals were leaving Menik Farm (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.7; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.9).

In remote return areas, road conditions were still poor and transport services limited. As a result, people living there, including returnees, had problems accessing health services. In the return areas, antenatal care and immunisation were provided by Medical Officer of Health Offices (MOHO) and outreach clinics. A psychiatric clinic was held every two weeks at Killinochchi General Hospital, and outreach clinics were held in the hospitals in Mulankavil, Poonahary and Tharmapuram. The number of health professionals in the return areas was too low to meet actual needs in terms of basic health services. Basic infrastructure, including communication, electricity and water supply, were also lacking in many health facilities. Around-the-clock health services were not available in many places because accommodation for health staff was lacking (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.7; WHO, 25 September 2010, p.2).

Nutrition

In Sri Lanka, almost one third of all children are affected by malnutrition, with acute malnutrition affecting 14 per cent of children younger than five. Children in conflict-affected areas, including displaced children, are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition due to the lack of child nutrition services in these areas, and they were reported to suffer from high levels of malnutrition (CRC, 19 October 2010, pp.7, 14).

In Menik Farm, acute malnutrition of children under five years of age was reported to be around 12.4 per cent as of November 2010, but only 40 to 50 per cent of children had been screened as most families were absent from the camp under the pass system when the screening was conducted. A nutrition and food assessment in the return areas was under way (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.7-8).

Water, sanitation and hygiene

In Menik Farm, there was one toilet for every 50 people and in Ramavil camp one for every 60 people, which was clearly below Sphere standards (one toilet is recommended for a maximum of 20 people). Sanitation and hygiene were poor in Menik Farm (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, pp.10-11). IDPs staying in transit sites also had to cope with insufficient sanitation and water facilities and lacked private living space (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.1).

In return areas in the north, water supplies were not sufficient due to a lack of funding since late August 2010. Many returnees had to resort to open defecation because there were not enough toilet facilities, a situation that was expected to facilitate the spread of waterborne diseases in the event of floods during the upcoming monsoon season (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.4; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.15). As of late July 2010, about 96,000 toilets had to be repaired or constructed and more than 60,000 wells were needed in the northern return areas. In October 2010, there was still an urgent need to clean wells, construct toilets and improve sanitation in many areas, including those where IDPs were staying with host families (UN OCHA, 31 July 2010, p.3; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.11).

PROPERTY, LIVELIHOODS, EDUCATION AND OTHER ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Land and Property

Guiding Principle (GP) 21 stipulates that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of property and possessions”, that “the property and possessions of internally displaced persons shall in all circumstances be protected”, and that “property and possessions left behind by internally displaced persons should be protected against destruction and arbitrary and illegal appropriation, occupation or use”. GP 29 (2) refers to IDPs’ right to restitution of property and possessions left behind and, where restitution is not possible, to adequate compensation. These rights are further elaborated by the “Pinheiro Principles”.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka does not explicitly provide for a right to land or property. However, a right not to be arbitrarily denied one’s right to land, housing and property is arguably established implicitly by the Constitution’s chapter on fundamental rights (which provides for rights such as the individual’s right to equality and the right to freedom of movement and free choice of residence) together with its Directive Principles of State Policy (providing for an adequate standard of living of all citizens including adequate food, clothing and housing) (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.14).

Land has played an important role in Sri Lanka in terms of identity and ethnicity and arguably was an important cause for grievances among the Tamil minority and thereby ultimately contributed to the armed conflict from 1983 to 2009. One example of this dates back to the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the GoSL resettled tens of thousands of landless Sinhalese families in “colonies” in the eastern province and allocated them irrigated land, while local Tamils were not granted equal access to that programme, including irrigated land (Muggah, 2008, pp.84-86).

According to the Centre for Policy Alternatives,

“In Sri Lanka, land has been a critical factor in the ethnic conflict that intensified and resulted in the outbreak of a war that spanned over two decades. State aided land settlement projects under development and irrigation schemes, the failure in addressing key land and development related issues, violence against particular communities that resulted in the abandonment of properties, and the establishment of *ad hoc* security restrictions in areas all contributed to the increasing tensions that ultimately led to the outbreak of war in Sri Lanka. Over the course of the war, the land problem was exacerbated by increased displacement of entire communities from their land, occupation of land belonging to private individuals by the military and LTTE, arbitrary seizure of land belonging to Muslims by the LTTE in the North and East, the establishment of High Security Zones (HSZ), Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and the loss of documentation. [...] Land as a highly politicised and ethnicised issue was an underlying cause of the war.” (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.7, 8, 19)

In Sri Lanka, a number of government agencies at the central, provincial and district levels are responsible for land issues. At the level of the central government, the following ministries, among others, share responsibilities on land issues (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.82):

- Ministry of Land and Land Development, including the following departments:
 - o Department of Land Commissioner,
 - o Department of Land Settlement,
 - o Land Use Planning Division,
 - o Department of Survey General,
 - o Institute of Surveying and Mapping;
- Ministry of Resettlement,

- Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resource Development,
- Ministry of Economic Development,
- Ministry of Defence.

At the provincial and district levels, Government Agents (renamed District Secretaries), land officers, divisional secretariats (DS) and Provincial Land Commissioners are also dealing with land. The large number of actors involved in land issues and their various responsibilities and reporting lines reportedly create confusion and duplication of work (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.82-83).

The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which came into force in 1988, was intended to devolve some powers to the provincial level, granting some land powers to the Provincial Councils. However, the central government retains final decision-making powers over all issues related to state land, including its alienation and use. In addition, the Provincial Councils are financially dependent on the central government, as they may not raise their own revenues (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.14-16). The case of local-level authorities such as Municipal and Urban Councils is similar: They have some power over state land in their areas, which may be overridden by the central government (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.83-84).

The Thirteenth Amendment also provides for a National Land Commission (NLC), which is yet to be established and which would be tasked to develop a National Land Policy (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.15-16). A draft land policy, which was developed in 2005 and which would establish the GoSL's overall policy on land, has not moved forward since (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.79).

The overriding powers of the central government on land issues and the absence of a comprehensive land policy have meant that decision-making in this area has often been ad-hoc and has not made much effort to take into account the needs and concerns of the local population, including IDPs and returnees living in conflict-affected areas (CPA, 13 May 2010, p.84).

There were reports that 50,000 new houses were to be built for members of the armed forces and their families, but it remained unclear how the beneficiaries would be selected and on which land – state or private – the houses would be built. Similar questions arose regarding land in the north and east that was to be given to farmers (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.17, 18).

82 per cent of Sri Lanka's land is state-owned (Lanka Business Online, 25 August 2010). In Jaffna, by contrast, 95 per cent of land is private, and more than 190 km² of state land lies within a High Security Zone (HSZ) (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010) (see [Displacement from areas declared as High Security Zones](#)). Under the Land Development Ordinance (LDO), the Land Grants (Special Provisions) Act and the State Land Ordinance, permits and grants over state land can be issued to people who intend to develop the land, for example through agriculture. A permit allows the permit holder to use the land for a specific purpose that is specified in the permit. Permits cannot be sold. After a specified time period and once certain conditions have been met, a permit can be converted into a grant. A grant gives the grant holder ownership of the land, but the authorities retain certain powers related to the land, including granting permission (or not) if the grant holder wants to sell the land (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.70-71).

The LDO gives preference to male heirs of permits and grants and does not allow for joint ownership, which puts widowed women, including those displaced by the conflict, at a disadvantage if they want to regain access to family land under a permit or a grant. By contrast, the State Land Ordinance does provide for joint ownership, according to a 2008 legal opinion by the Attorney General (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.72-73; GICHD, August 2010, pp.7-8).

The Prescription Ordinance (PO), which holds that someone who has occupied a plot of private land for at least ten consecutive years becomes the owner of that land, has reportedly not been applied in times of conflict in the jurisprudence of the Northern courts. However, it also has not been formally amended to codify its non-application in times of conflict (IDMC interview, 13 December 2010; CPA, 13 May 2010, p.76).

Most people displaced by the conflict lost documentation, including documentation related to land ownership. Others who possess permits to use state land may no longer have the documents to prove this after displacement, technically making them encroachers when they return. Damage to registry offices due to the conflict also led to loss of documentation in many cases, making it more difficult for IDPs to establish their claims to land and property. In Sri Lanka, land disputes can only be addressed through courts, with an average land case taking three to five years to resolve; courts in the northern districts of Mullaitivu and Killinochchi have been swamped with land cases (IDMC interview, 29 November 2010; UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.2; CPA, 13 May 2010, p.64).

A national restitution and compensation scheme is urgently needed, in addition to a policy to deal with conflicting claims of returnees displaced in different periods, for example to areas that were recently cleared of landmines and UXO. The status of land “titles” distributed by the LTTE also needs to be clarified (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp. 64, 76; CPA, September 2010, pp.22-23).

In 2008, the GoSL introduced an initiative to provide state land to landless people under the Land Development Ordinance and the State Land Ordinance. In spite of the fact that many among those displaced by the armed conflict may be landless, the initiative does not mention displaced people and no effort has been made to inform IDPs about the existence of the initiative. There were concerns that the initiative may discriminate against some people and be used to change the demographics in some areas. In the Eastern Province, the processing of the first round of applications was still under way in 2010. In the north, the initiative had not started yet (CPA, 13 May 2010, pp.57-62).

Livelihoods

Guiding Principle 22 (1b) refers to IDPs’ “right to seek freely opportunities for employment and to participate in economic activities”. There is no available information on the livelihood activities of IDPs living in camps such as Menik Farm beyond the fact that IDPs in camps sold dry food rations to buy fresh food, baby milk powder and other items that they did not have access to (see [Food and water](#)).

IDPs staying with host families and returnees had difficulty accessing livelihoods. In northern Sri Lanka, agriculture and fishing are the two main livelihoods, with 60 per cent of returning IDP households having worked in farming before they were displaced and with many others being fishermen (WFP, 12 October 2010, p.5).

With demining of residential areas still a priority in most return districts, clearance of surrounding fields, streams and wells lagged behind. This has meant that many people who returned to cleared residential areas did not access to agricultural livelihoods and remained dependent on assistance (CPA, September 2010, pp.10-11; GICHD, August 2010, p.13; UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.13; UN OCHA, 26 March 2010, p.6).

IDPs staying with host families also had difficulties accessing livelihood opportunities. For example, displaced fishermen who were staying with host families in Jaffna district and who had been displaced from other districts were not able to obtain fishing licences in Jaffna (UN OCHA, 21 May 2010, p.5).

In October 2010, the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation (CGR) announced that loans to develop livelihood projects in the amount of up to LKR 250,000 (USD 2,240) were available for “separates” who had undergone “rehabilitation”, and that IDPs who returned to their homes were eligible to apply as well (GoSL, 14 October 2010).

Education

Guiding Principle 23 stipulates that “every human being has the right to education”. However, in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces, children in general and thousands of displaced children in particular had their education interrupted due to the conflict. In the Vanni and in Jaffna at the end of 2010, physical infrastructure for schools was still lacking, and there was a lack of teachers in camps as well as in the return areas. Compared to other countries in South Asia, government spending in the education sector remained rather low (CRC, 19 October 2010, p.16; UNICEF, 18 November 2010).

Camps

In January 2010, there were only 300 teachers for more than 23,000 pupils in Menik Farm, and as a result, some families sent their children to children's homes in Vavuniya to give them access to education (UN OCHA, 15 January 2010, p.6). As of December 2010, the number of teachers in the camp remained insufficient, and absenteeism of teachers was a problem. In addition, there were many dropouts, attendance was poor and the quality of education services was low (UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.8).

As of October 2010, there were 50 Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) in Menik Farm for more than 5,000 displaced children at primary and secondary level. Some of them were run down and needed urgent repair in order to continue to function. In late 2009 and early 2010, children's education was interrupted as TLS were used as rain shelters during monsoon, and the same may happen in late 2010 and early 2011 (UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.5).

Return areas

Some progress has been made in making education available in return areas, but obstacles remain. Some schools in the return areas continued to be occupied by government forces or used as detention or “rehabilitation” sites for “separatees” (see [Liberty and freedom of movement](#)), including the primary section of the V/Tamil MV school and the Omanthai Central College in Vavuniya (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, pp.5, 6).

As of August 2010, one school in Mullaitivu district was used simultaneously as a “separatee” site and as a school. In May 2010, this was the case for two schools in Vavuniya district, and in early March 2010, nine schools in Vavuniya district were used in this way. The sharing of school buildings between actual schools and “separatee” sites had a negative effect on children's education. Girls in particular did not want to use the shared toilets, and infrastructure including water was diverted from the school to the “separatee” site (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.9; UN OCHA, 21 May 2010, p.7; UN OCHA, 29 April 2010, p.2; UN OCHA, 11 March 2010, p.7). In addition, schools that had been occupied by military forces were reported to remain damaged, with little or no reconstruction of their infrastructure, after occupation ended (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.6).

By late March 2010, 115 out of a total of 326 schools in the Vanni had reopened, and a little more than 15,000 pupils were enrolled compared to 82,000 recorded in 2008. The low number of pupils attending school was reportedly due to issues such as problems with transport to schools and children helping their parents with livelihood activities. In October 2010, 226 schools had reopened in the Vanni, with more than 40,000 pupils enrolled. With just above 4,400 teachers working in the return areas, more than 600 teachers were still needed as of August 2010 (UN OCHA, 26 March 2010, p.6; UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.9; UN OCHA, 8 October 2010, p.5).

FAMILY LIFE, PARTICIPATION, ACCESS TO JUSTICE, DOCUMENTATION, AND OTHER CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Civil and political rights

Guiding Principle 22 provides for IDPs' rights to freedom of opinion and expression (a), to freedom of association and to participation in community affairs (c), and to vote and to participate in public affairs (d). The means necessary to access these rights include the right to documentation, as laid down in Guiding Principle 20 (3). In Sri Lanka, IDPs and returnees did not have full access to these rights during 2010.

Documentation, including death certificates

In order to become eligible to apply for a National Identity Card (NIC), people had to have lived in one place for at least six months. This particularly affected IDPs and returnees, many of whom lost their NICs and/or birth certificate during displacement (UN OCHA, 29 April 2010, p.6).

Relatives of people killed in the conflict, including IDPs, were likely to have difficulties obtaining compensation and, for example, accessing inherited land. For the first 18 months after the end of the armed conflict, people were able to obtain death certificates only if they were eye witnesses to the death. Also, for political reasons linked to the GoSL's insistence that there were no civilian casualties during the final months of the armed conflict, it was expected that not many death certificates for people who died during that time as a result of the conflict would be issued (CPA, September 2010, p.9; IDMC interview, 29 November 2010).

Voter registration

In the run-up to the presidential election on 26 January 2010, there were concerns that IDPs and returnees would have problems with voter registration. As of 11 January, only about 35,000 IDPs in camps had registered to vote, and most of the returnees had not registered, according to the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL). The Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE) criticised that for returnees who had registered while still in camps, the question of transport to polling booths, which were likely to be set up in camps, had not been solved. In addition, a criterion for people to be registered was that their names appeared in previous voters' lists. However, in the Vanni these lists reportedly had not been systematically kept for the years after 1989 (IRIN, 11 January 2010; UN OCHA, 1 January 2010, p.5; UN OCHA, 21 December 2009, p.5).

During the parliamentary elections in April 2010, it was reported that identity documents given to IDPs in camps were sometimes not sufficient for voter registration. IDPs also did not have clear information on whether they were to vote in the camps or in their district of residence (IRIN, 12 April 2010). In June 2010, IDPs in camps and many returnees had not yet been included in ongoing surveys to amend the electoral registry (The Island, 23 June 2010).

As of early September 2010 IDPs remaining in camps had not been registered as voters, according to the Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE). In the return areas some returnees had not been registered for voting due to a shortage of local officials (The Sunday Leader, 5 September 2010).

PROTECTION OF SPECIAL CATEGORIES OF IDPS (AGE, GENDER, DIVERSITY, MINORITIES)

Children

Displaced and returnee children are particularly vulnerable and are disproportionately affected by the lack of protection and assistance in Sri Lanka. Children living in camps, in transit and in the return areas were suffering from poor living conditions, and many were traumatised because they had experienced family separation and multiple episodes of displacement, including to premature returns to areas of origin where conditions for sustainable return were not yet in place (CRC, 19 October 2010, p.17).

In December 2009, the GoSL set up a family tracing and reunification unit in Vavuniya (UN GA, 3 September 2010, p.14). However, in October 2010 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) noted with concern that hundreds of children were still missing and many children remained unidentified because tracing was not coordinated and humanitarian agencies with expertise in this area had difficulties gaining access to IDPs and returnees due to government restrictions (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.3). The CRC's concern was confirmed in November 2010 when the GoSL asked the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has long-time expertise in family tracing, to close its offices in Vavuniya and Jaffna (IRIN, 23 November 2010).

More than 560 children who had allegedly been associated with the LTTE were detached from the adult "separatees" soon after the end of the conflict. UNICEF monitored them while they were held in the following Child Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres: Poonthotam Vocational School (Vavuniya) and Ratmalana Hindu College (Colombo) and Sathurukondan Sarvodaya Vocational Training Centre (Batticaloa). All of them had been released by May 2010 (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 11 December 2009, pp.10, 12; ICJ, September 2010, pp.5; 10).

It was unclear whether additional children continued to be among the adult "separatees", as independent observers did not consistently have access to the adult "separatee" sites. There were concerns that children may still be detained under the Sri Lankan Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, without access to their families, a lawyer, a judge or other competent authorities that could represent them when challenging the reasons for being detained (ICJ, September 2010, p.10; CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.7).

Child protection services, including reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, family reunification, and opportunities for education and employment, were still limited in the northern return areas (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.23). National non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including those providing child protection, were reportedly subject to intimidation, attacks and arrest, and their access to conflict-affected areas was limited. There were concerns that displaced children were discriminated against and that they did not receive adequate assistance from the government. At the same time, the provision of assistance by humanitarian agencies was restricted by the government, especially since June 2010 (CRC, 19 October 2010, pp.6, 7).

Child protection services are especially important to prevent re-recruitment of children, including returnee children, by armed groups in the north and east, as there were reports on recruitment and threats of re-recruitment of children by "commander" Iniya Barrathi, who formerly belonged to the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP) in Ampara district. Children who were participating in rehabilitation programmes did not want to return to Ampara because they feared re-recruitment and abuse (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.4; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 11 December 2009, p.7).

After breaking away from the LTTE in March 2004, the TMVP, also known as the Karuna Group, began fighting the LTTE alongside with government forces in the east of Sri Lanka in 2006. That year, government forces were reported not to have intervened in spite of being present when the Karuna Group abducted and recruited children,

including from IDP camps, in the east of Sri Lanka, and allegedly even assisted the Karuna Group recruiting children (HRW, 24 January 2007, pp.29-30; UN SC, 21 December 2007, p.10; BBC News, 13 November 2006).

The TMVP continued recruiting children after being registered as a political party in January 2008 (UN SC, 25 June 2009, p.7). As of October 2010, those responsible for recruiting children in Sri Lanka, including internally displaced children, had not been brought to justice and investigations into the alleged complicity of government officials had not made significant progress (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.5).

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

National response

Sri Lanka still has no legislation on the protection of internally displaced people, as a draft bill on this issue has been stalled since 2008. The National Protection and Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons Project of the National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (NHRC) was responsible for drafting the bill (Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, 8 August 2008). In October 2010, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stated that there was “inadequate support from the State party” for protection and assistance to IDP and returnee children (CRC, 19 October 2010, p.17).

Since late 2009, the speedy return of “new” IDPs to their home areas in the north of Sri Lanka has appeared to be the priority of the GoSL. However, it did not prioritise the provision of information to IDPs about the conditions in the return areas or efforts to take into account IDPs’ own preferences. The process to put in place conditions for sustainable return in the north, in particular the clearance of landmines and UXO first from residential areas and subsequently from the surrounding areas, has lagged behind the pace of returns. Landmine and UXO contamination of return areas will remain a major obstacle to the sustainability of returns in the coming months and years, as it not only represents a physical danger, but in turn prevents or limits returnees’ access to basic necessities as well as civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights (IDMC interview, 5 January 2011).

The budget published by the GoSL in October 2010 allocates LKR 215 billion (\$1.9 billion) to defence and only LKR 1.7 billion (\$15 million) to return and resettlement of IDPs. Compared to the previous budget, the defence allocation has increased, while the allocation for return and resettlement has decreased. Given the widespread military presence in the north and reports on new military installations there, this seems to confirm a trend towards militarisation at the cost of the enjoyment of rights of people displaced by the conflict before and since 2008 (The Island, 25 October 2010).

International response

The 2010 mid-year review of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) reduced the funding requirement for 2010 from \$338 million to \$288 million because NGO implementing partners have had difficulty gaining access to beneficiaries due to the difficult accreditation process of the PTF and the continued contamination of large areas in the north with landmines and UXO. Lack of funding was also a reason for the reduction of the funding requirement. Shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) were particularly affected by the reduction, while health, nutrition and economic recovery were also impacted (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.1).

In October 2009, a report commissioned by the European Commission concluded that Sri Lanka was not fully implementing three human rights treaties it is party to: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As a result, the European Commission in August 2010 suspended the preferential treatment in terms of trade tariffs that Sri Lanka had benefitted from under the Generalised System of Preferences (Plus) (GSP+) (The Guardian, 13 October 2010).

In October 2010, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) noted that the NHRC lacked independence and did not have the resources necessary to carry out its mandate (CRC-OPAC, 19 October 2010, p.2). The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, which was passed with a large majority on 8 September 2010, stipulates that the president may appoint as well as remove the members of the NHRC (IDSA, 7 October 2010). In December 2007 already, the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion

and Protection of Human Rights had downgraded the NHRC from A to B status due to its lack of independence (CRC, 19 October 2010, p.3).

Humanitarian access

IDPs' and returnees' access to protection and assistance was hampered by GoSL restrictions on the access of humanitarian agencies to certain areas. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in October 2010 expressed its concern that IDP and returnee children were "prevented from receiving assistance due to [...] the restrictions placed since June 2010 on the activities of international and national humanitarian agencies" (CRC, 19 October 2010, p.17).

UN agencies needed permission from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to access the Northern Province. In 2010, they were granted access for periods from one to three months at a time. The current clearance for the UN Head of Office and field teams to access the Northern Province covers the period up to February 2011 (UN SC, 11 November 2010, p.24; UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.2 and 31 July 2010, p.2; IDMC interview, 24 November 2010).

All humanitarian projects in the return areas in the north needed approval from the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province (PTF). As of December 2010, PTF-approved projects had to be submitted to the District Coordination Committee for approval. In addition, international staff as well as vehicles needed clearance from the MoD to access the Northern Province, with access granted for three months at a time (UN OCHA, 31 August 2010, p.2; IDMC interview, 24 November 2010; UN OCHA, 2 December 2010, p.2).

The PTF was reportedly not transparent about the reasons for granting or denying approval. For example, most agencies providing assistance for returnees, in particular in the area of livelihoods, were denied access to the Vanni in July 2010 without reasons being given. The PTF did not grant approval to any projects focusing on issues essential for durable solutions, such as protection, gender, capacity-building, documentation, or legal assistance. Neither was approval granted for assessments (CPA, September 2010, pp.11-12; IDMC interviews, 24 and 29 November 2010).

The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) did not have access to most areas where IDPs and returnees were living, nor did it have access to "separates" in detention. In November 2010, the GoSL asked the ICRC to close its offices in Jaffna and Vavuniya and to continue its operations exclusively from Colombo (CPA, September 2010, p.8; ICJ, September 2010, p.5; IRIN, 23 November 2010).

The difficult access situation complicated humanitarian agencies' planning of activities and the delivery of services to IDPs and returnees in the north. Funding shortages during 2010 may have been due to reluctance on the part of international donors to fund programmes that were dependent on short-term approval and could be called off on short notice. It was also problematic that the GoSL did not endorse the UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) for 2010 (UN OCHA, 14 July 2010, p.41). If it expects donors to cater to the needs of IDPs and returnees, given that its own budget has made return a very low priority, the GoSL must facilitate continued access for humanitarian actors to the areas where IDPs and returnees live. This is crucial if new grievances among this population are to be avoided and if these people are to achieve durable solutions.

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