

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION UPDATE

SRI LANKA

4 March 2009

CHILDREN ARE FACING INCREASED HARDSHIP DUE TO THE INTENSIFICATION OF FIGHTING

- Intensification of the fighting between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the north of Sri Lanka has resulted in grave humanitarian consequences for over 200,000 displaced persons trapped in a rapidly shrinking LTTE controlled area. Hundreds of children have been killed or injured.
- Besides the great dangers to the safety of children and civilians, scarcity of food and clean water, insufficient health care, and poor shelter are of great concern.
- So far more than 35,000 civilians have escaped the fighting and are now in government-held territory mainly in Vavuniya District. These IDPs have been displaced as many as twelve times in the past year and are now located in temporary sites. They are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Many more IDPs are expected shortly.



1. ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Fighting between Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has significantly intensified since August 2008. It dramatically escalated since mid January this year. As the territory held by the LTTE has continually decreased, as many as 230,000 displaced persons under their control have been increasingly caught in the crossfire. The population trapped in the fighting includes tens of thousands of children.

The conflict is part of a more than 25 year struggle between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE which has claimed the lives of more than 70,000 people.

Recent Government advances have pressed the LTTE into a last remaining pocket of territory, uprooting hundreds of thousands of civilians from their homes. The IDPs are trapped between the government forces and the LTTE, prevented by the latter to leave the area.

The toll on civilians is heavy. Children are being killed, witnessing their family and parents killed, being separated, and suffering injuries including burns, fractures, shrapnel and bullet wounds. There are an increasing number of cases of children being reported as forcibly recruited by the LTTE. In addition there is a dire lack of clean water, food, proper sanitation and medicine. In turn this has further worsened the nutritional status of affected populations, with malnutrition rates in the North higher than the national average.

Recruitment of children by armed groups continues to be reported and is assumed to have increased over the past months in the North. The conflict has further left more than 60,000 children of primary school age out of the education system. Many of the children have been displaced up to twelve times over the past year and have been living in bunkers and trenches for weeks on end.

Since December 2008 at least 35,000 Tamil civilians have escaped the fighting in the conflict zones of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts and crossed behind army lines into government-held territory mainly in Vavuniya District, but also into Mannar, Trincomalee and Jaffna districts. The IDPs are located in government transit sites around Vavuniya town. While access for aid workers to the camps is improving, the families inside the transit sites are prevented from leaving the camps. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people still remain trapped in the war zone.



The main A9 road to Jaffna remains closed, cutting off some 600,000 people living on the northern peninsula including over 22,000 IDPs. In the eastern province, military offensives initiated in mid-2006 displaced more than 170,000 people who previously lived in areas controlled by the LTTE. The displaced persons were temporarily settled into camps and welfare centres or stayed with host families. By the third quarter of 2007 the entire Eastern Province was brought under the full control of the Government and a resettlement process was initiated to allow IDPs to return to their villages. To date, the majority of the IDPs have been resettled in their places of origin in the districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee and plans are underway to resettle approximately 16,000 IDPs remaining in camps and with host families in the East. The fighting has significantly damaged community infrastructure and the returnee population suffer from lack of access to safe drinking water, health care facilities, schools and shelters.

2. UNICEF RESPONSE: ACTIVITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

UNICEF, in close collaboration with its partners, is scaling up its activities to meet the immediate needs of an additional 200,000 civilians expected to flee from the conflict zones of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts in the near future. The main focus is on maintaining international standards of humanitarian assistance in line with UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies, in the priority areas of health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education and child protection. While humanitarian access to the conflict zone is extremely limited, UNICEF is currently providing assistance to over 35,000 IDPs in transit sites around Vavuniya town and is scaling up its humanitarian preparedness and response to assist a rapidly increasing number of IDPs coming out of the conflict zone. In parallel UNICEF is continuing its support to over 200,000 returnees and host community members in resettlement areas in Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts in the eastern part of the country.

Late 2008 saw the formal adoption of the "cluster approach" in its response to the ongoing complex emergency in Sri Lanka where UNICEF leads the clusters for WASH, Nutrition and Education, and is also leading the sub-group for Child Protection under the Protection cluster formally led by UNHCR.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

The WASH emergency response is currently being scaled up to address urgent needs of approximately 200,000 vulnerable conflict affected persons displaced in the Northern parts of Sri Lanka. The response has been planned by the UNICEF led WASH cluster based on SPHERE Standards to ensure timely provision of safe water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene assistance and to prevent any outbreak of waterborne diseases. These interventions have been highlighted as a high priority both by the Government of Sri Lanka and the humanitarian community through the WASH cluster.

Since the beginning of the year, through UNICEF support, all 35,000 IDPs located in camps around Vavuniya town, have gained access to safe water through water trucking and the provision of water tanks, buckets and water containers to allow water storage at household level. Meanwhile, in order to reduce dependency on water trucking and to improve cost-effectiveness, tube wells will be re/constructed and open wells rehabilitated. Water quality testing of the various water sources will be undertaken to ensure that IDPs have access to safe drinking water. UNICEF has rapidly put up emergency toilets over the past weeks and is actively working with the cluster in order to stand ready to cover the needs of an additional 200,000 IDPs expected in the transit sites. Over 14,000 IDPs have also benefited from improved hygiene through distribution of hygiene kits and environmental cleaning kits. Hygiene promotion sessions as well as interventions aiming at safe disposal of solid waste will shortly be undertaken in the various sites. UNICEF is further pre-positioning key WASH items such as hygiene kits with soap replenishment, chlorine tablets, 1,000 liter tanks, 10 liter water containers and plastic buckets, emergency toilets and cleaning kits and other related items in the Vavuniya logistic hub.

In 2008, as a response to the conflict emergency, the WASH cluster was instrumental in providing safe water and adequate sanitation as per SPHERE standards for conflict affected persons living in camps and communal places or with host families in the North and the East of Sri Lanka. Since the onset of the conflict in 2006, 2,850 emergency and semi-permanent toilets have been constructed for the use of 57,000 IDPs. Sufficient amounts of safe water have been supplied to over 220,000 IDPs on a daily basis through water bowsering or tube wells equipped with hand-pumps.

In the East, the emphasis is on the reconstruction of water and sanitation facilities for approximately 100,000 returnees and host community members in resettlement areas, within household premises as well as in schools and health facilities.

Education

UNICEF, together with partners, aims to ensure access to education and support psychosocial and catch-up education activities in line with Minimum Standards of Education in Emergencies for IDP and host communities. UNICEF is providing Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS), with water and sanitation facilities, coupled with supply of school materials and targeted teacher training to support psychosocial needs. This will evolve into catch-up education, supporting children to gain the skills that they have missed out on due to the conflict, and helping the teachers to deal with multiple levels in the classroom.

In transit sites in Vavuniya, UNICEF is currently in the process of constructing temporary learning Spaces (TLS) to provide educational, recreational and psychosocial services to more than 1,800 displaced children. Black boards, teachers' kits, recreational kits and school supplies have also been provided. Supplies for up to 80,000 children have been pre-positioned in Vavuniya, in preparing for an outpouring of IDPs within the coming weeks/months.

In 2008, despite continued displacements in the Vanni area, the education system continued to function, with continuous mapping of the location of children and teachers, and consistent planning exercises leading to attachment of displaced schools to schools in relocated areas. Support was provided to the Zonal Education authorities to shift furniture and school supplies, provide temporary shelters for use as classrooms, and ensure that sufficient stationary was available for the children to attend school, thus covering 80 per cent of the needs. By the end of 2008, a total of 178 schools (out of 245) with approximately 55,000 students were displaced and were functioning in other locations. Education officials are managing schools, capitalising on prepositioned school kits and temporary learning spaces constructed with local material and UNICEF support, and providing psychosocial support benefiting from preparatory training undertaken in 2007/2008.

Given the worsening of the humanitarian situation in the conflict areas, assistance is focusing on ensuring that an estimated 60,000 school-aged children currently displaced in the Northern part of Sri Lanka have access to quality education as they are arriving into government controlled areas. Given the multiple displacements and trauma experienced by school-aged children, their immediate needs when arriving in displacement sites relate to the existence of a protective physical space for learning and access to psychosocial activities. An additional 16,000 students are affected by temporary closure of schools currently occupied by IDPs around Vavuniya town.

In the resettled areas in the East, children have missed out of schooling for extended periods of time and most of the schools have been destroyed or badly damaged. UNICEF, using the Child Friendly School approach, is therefore focusing on catch-up education, and on strengthening the education system to cater more effectively for up to 70,000 resettled students, provision of essential supplies and school repairs including water and sanitation facilities.

Health

UNICEF, in close collaboration with the Government and the health cluster, is currently contributing to ensure that the IDPs in the camps have access to essential health services. Over the past few weeks UNICEF has provided Emergency Health kits for 10,000 people, Infant kits for 500 babies as well as Expectant Mothers' kits for 632 pregnant women in transit sites. Large tents have been provided to several health facilities to increase their much needed bed capacity.

UNICEF continues its support to ensure basic health and nutrition services to people in resettled areas in the East. Interventions include community mobilisation to improve maternal and child health, capacity building through the provision of training and support to approximately 100 health professionals as well as through construction and rehabilitation of damaged health infrastructure.

The health and nutrition sector has been supporting the Government to deliver an effective response to the emergency situation throughout 2008. In all affected districts, UNICEF has played a key role, working in coordination with Ministry of Health and Regional Director of Health Services (RDHS), to restore the basic health and nutrition needs of 90 per cent of conflict affected children and pregnant women. Activities have included the reconstruction of damaged health facilities, provision of supplies required for cold chain maintenance for vaccine storage, running of mobile clinics for difficult to access populations and implementation of nutrition surveillance and the Nutrition Rehabilitation Programme (NRP). In addition, health emergency supplies such as emergency health kits, infants' kits, expectant mothers' kits and mosquito nets have been provided by UNICEF.

Nutrition

The UNICEF led nutrition cluster is working closely together with the food and health clusters to address the urgent nutritional needs among conflict affected children as well as pregnant and lactating mothers. Special attention is given to the displaced population coming out of the conflict zone in the North, given the extreme

conditions they have endured, including food scarcity, over extended periods of time. Through the implementation of the Nutrition Rehabilitation Programme (NRP), support will continue to be provided to assess and monitor the nutritional status of an estimated total of 20,000 children and 6,400 pregnant and lactating mothers. Identified cases of severe and moderate acute under nutrition will be provided with therapeutic and supplementary feeding. Improved Infant and Young Child Feeding practices and breastfeeding will further be promoted. In order to prevent micronutrient deficiencies among pregnant and lactating women and children under five, UNICEF will provide multiple micronutrient supplements (sprinkles and vitamin A mega doses) as well as parasite control through the distribution of de-worming tablets for 20,000 children under 5 years and 6,400 pregnant and lactating women.

Effective nutrition outreach is challenged by the limited capacities, particularly insufficient numbers of qualified health workers, as the current situation requires additional staff to provide emergency health and nutrition assistance. Rapid training on 'Nutrition in Emergencies' will therefore be undertaken for 100 Public Health Midwives (PHM) and other health professionals.

Child Protection

UNICEF's emergency response in transit camps in Vavuniya currently focus on the provision of care for unaccompanied and separated children and psychosocial support to up to 45,000 displaced children in transit centres. Rapid assessments are being undertaken of accessible camps and responses being developed and implemented to prevent and attend to specific risks for children in emergencies such as: family separation, children at risk of abduction, recruitment or abuse (including sexual violence), and protection of children leaving armed groups. Mobile units for recreational / psychosocial activities are being used until Child Friendly Spaces are established in transit camps. In addition, together with UNHCR and other protection agencies, UNICEF monitors and reports on child rights' violations.

The main child protection issues being addressed include monitoring and reporting of underage recruitment and other grave child rights' violations under Security Council Resolution 1612; prevention of child rights' violations through community-based protection networks; reintegration support for children used by armed groups; provision of emergency care and protection for children living without family care; psychosocial support through Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) and referral to appropriate services; and provision of Mine Risk Education (MRE) and safety awareness.

An under-age recruitment database has been maintained by UNICEF since 2002, which has proven to generate important information for effective advocacy for the release of underage recruits and prevent further recruitment of children by both the LTTE and Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP). Collaboration between the Government of Sri Lanka and UNICEF has resulted in the signing in December 2008 of an Action Plan between the Government, the TMVP, and UNICEF, together with the adoption of new special regulations which strengthen the legal protection of children released from armed groups. Furthermore, a rehabilitation centre for former children associated with armed groups was opened, as was a Child Welfare Unit in Batticaloa where parents and relatives can come and report the recruitment of their children and be provided with a coordinated response to get the children released.

UNICEF, in close collaboration with Government is working at the establishment/strengthening of child protection coordination networks at central and district level to ensure that a more coordinated and effective response is provided for children and communities during an emergency. Through the coordination networks established in Vavuniya, emergency preparedness and response plans were put in place, including pre-positioning of contingency stocks and agreements on agency responsibilities.

In the East, UNICEF continues to support conflict affected children and families as they resettle into their communities through the provision of Mine Risk Education and psychosocial support for children. Child Friendly Spaces/Children's Clubs are established through which vulnerable children can be identified and referred to specialised services when required. UNICEF also plays a key role, together with other protection agencies, in monitoring and reporting child rights' violations and advocating on behalf of these children.

3. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS AND RECEIPTS

As part of the joint CHAP appeal launched on 18 February 2009 in Sri Lanka and in Geneva in 4 March 2009, UNICEF currently still needs US\$ 12.3 million out of a total requirement of US\$ 15 million¹ to be able to respond to the increasing needs of children and women in Sri Lanka. Additional funding is urgently needed to ensure a comprehensive and timely response to the rapidly increasing number of IDPs in need of assistance.

Table 1: Funds Received against CHAP/HAR*

Appeal Sector	Requirements by Sector	Funds Received (US\$)	Unmet requirements (US\$)	% Unfunded
Nutrition	2,200,000	384,751	1,815,249	83%
Health	1,100,000	275,039	824,961	75%
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	4,300,000	1,372,025	2,927,975	68%
Education	4,200,000	427,465	3,772,535	90%
Child Protection	3,200,000	203,300	2,996,700	94%
Total**	15,000,000	2,662,580	12,337,420	82%

* Funds received against this appeal will be used to respond to both the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women as outlined above. If UNICEF should receive funds in excess of the medium-term funding requirements for this emergency, UNICEF will use those funds to support other, under-funded emergencies.

** The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7%. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

Table 2: Funding Priorities as of March 2009

The funding priorities are related to the emergency response to transit centres in Vavuniya district. While the estimated number of IDPs amount to 35,000 as of end February, it is expected that the number will rapidly increase to up to 200,000 persons.

Project	Beneficiaries/coverage	Amount Urgently Required (US\$)
1. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	230,000 IDPs	1,500,000
2. Nutrition	20,000 children U5 and 6,400 pregnant and lactating women	1,000,000
3. Child Protection	45,000 displaced children	1,000,000
Total Priority needs		3,500,000

Further information on the Sri Lanka emergency programme can be obtained from:

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¹ The UNICEF needs in the CHAP 2009 are equal to the needs reflected in the UNICEF Humanitarian Action Report.