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Human Rights Index

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HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

*Prepared by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR)**

Well known is the long-standing principle, championed by the International Committee of the Red Cross especially, that victims of natural disasters have a human right to disaster relief. Less well known is the long-established fact, recently reaffirmed by Amnesty International, that “human rights are most in jeopardy in situations of crisis and emergency”—ergo the importance of the rule, expressed often by the United Nations, that victims of natural disasters have a right to added protection of their human rights in their time of suffering. The Indian Ocean tsunamis of December 26, 2004 are tragic reminders of the gravity of these concerns. Massive internal displacement and destruction of agricultural land made access to food problematic or impossible for many. Potable water became scarce. Urgently needed humanitarian assistance was distributed often in politically conditional and discriminatory ways. In Indonesia’s Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) province, according to the human rights NGO Forum Asia, the Indonesian military refused food, medicine, and clothing to tsunami victims lacking government identification cards, and even beat them. In India, according to Human Rights Watch, humanitarian relief was largely withheld from the “untouchable” (dalit) population. Since the 12/26 tsunamis, an earthquake in Iran, flooding in Pakistan, and another huge earthquake in Sumatra claimed further hundreds of lives, destroyed homes, and otherwise jeopardized the rights of the affected populations. Typically in these situations, women, children, and the poor are the disproportionate victims, being subject often to sexual assault and violence beyond that of the disaster itself.

- 5: number of child soldiers recruited from among children orphaned by the tsunamis in Sri Lanka within less than 3 weeks of the disaster by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are estimated to have lost 700 to 2,000 soldiers to the tsunamis and have long been known to recruit child soldiers through violent coercion, intimidation, and abduction (Human Rights Watch, 2005; BBC News, 2005)
- 230: minimum number of Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) partisans the Indonesian military (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, TNI) estimated it had killed across NAD province in its (US supported) “war on terror” only one month after the tsunamis despite cease-fire calls by Indonesia’s president and one declared unilaterally by GAM, each in the name of national unity to facilitate relief from suffering compounded by the burn-

- ing of villages, destruction of food sources, and abuse of GAM members via rape, torture, and summary executions in TNI's "war on terror" (*Taipei Times*, 2005; *West Papua News*, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2005)
- 1,814:** minimum number of NAD province teachers killed, 3,000 left homeless, and 736 Banda Aceh school buildings damaged by the tsunamis on top of more than 1,200 schools set afire in the ongoing GAM/TNI armed conflict, thus further impairing the right of children to education (Aceh Working Group, 2005)
- 27,000:** estimated number of Sri Lankan fisherman killed along with $\frac{2}{3}$ of the nation's fishing boats wrecked by the tsunamis, thus putting Sri Lanka's fishing industry in serious doubt and a major food source ("basic need") at severe risk (UN Environment Programme, 2005)
- 36,000:** estimated hectares of NAD province farmland contaminated by seawater, sewage, fuel, chemicals, etc. deposited by the tsunamis, threatening enjoyment of the right to food (UN Environment Programme, 2005)
- 62,000:** estimated freshwater wells contaminated by the tsunamis in Sri Lanka (where 100% of wells were contaminated), the Maldives (90%), and Somalia (where hazardous waste from coastal dump sites contaminated an unknown percentage of inland wells), severely compromising the human right to potable water (UN Environmental Programme, 2005)
- 99,500:** number of occupied houses destroyed and 46,300 damaged by the tsunamis near Sri Lanka's coast, representing 13% of available housing in the governmental districts affected, thereby threatening the human right to shelter (UN Environment Programme, 2005)
- 1,600,000:** estimated number of persons internally displaced by the tsunamis in countries around the Indian Ocean rim, with consequent severe strain on rights to water, food, education, and work, especially for women and children (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2005)
- 4,000,000–8,000,000:** estimated cubic meters of logs needed to repair buildings damaged and lost from the tsunamis in the Banda Aceh region alone, an amount that cannot be supplied from local resources without severe, long-term harm to forest ecology and water resources, and so to the right to water, to a clean and sustainable environment, and to the future livelihood of the Acehnese who rely on the forest for employment and sustenance (UN Environment Programme, 2005)

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