

# One year after the Dec. 26, 2005 tsunami

Tuesday 24 January 2006, by [WIJETHILAKE Niel](#) (Date first published: 19 January 2006).

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On December 26 2005, Sri Lankans commemorated the first anniversary of the disastrous Tsunami that brought fear and devastation that will remain and haunt their minds for many years to come. Official reports said that that close on 60,000 human lives were lost and the damage caused to houses and property was immense. The whole of Sri Lanka without any distinction of class, creed or colour wept for many months after this catastrophe.

And it needs to be explained that the Tsunami not only washed away human lives and homes but also represented a thundering blow to the economy that may take several decades to rebuild.

## The situation at present

Families who live in those ruined areas are facing a more deplorable situation today than the damage caused by Tsunami tidal waves. Many thousands have lost their beloved ones, relatives, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and children etc. Thousands and thousands of children have become orphans.

The virulent seawater that flooded many parts of the island created more widows and widowers amidst destitution. The displaced people's destiny has become desperate.

A few days after this catastrophe a few NGO's and various people came forward and helped them to fulfil their primary needs. Those organizations and people made thousands of temporary houses for the displaced persons.

But even though one year has passed, many displaced people are still living in those temporary dwellings. They were eagerly looking to see some kind of light far away in the horizon that could illumine their gloomy lives. The main problem is Sri Lankan government did not build even a single new house for those who were affected by the Tsunami.

Even though some kind of reconstruction work has been started along the sea belt of the southern province, it is regrettable to state that along the sea belts of the northern and eastern provinces people are overlooked and totally neglected.

This is despite the fact that the previous government of Mrs Kumaranathunga passed a resolution with blessing of all political parties except the Sinhala- chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) in the Parliament that established a post Tsunami operational management structure (PTOMS).

This was extinguished because of short-sighted communal segments who campaigned against PTOM and sought legal remedies to make PTOMS null and void.

The reconstruction and rebuilding programmes and work of the government and some NGOs proceeding in a lethargic manner. The work is lagging. There is no proper and well-planned mechanism to accelerate and intensify the work.

Proper management of funds received from donors is essentially needed. These are the vital issues that we face today. It would not be difficult to eradicate weaknesses and overcome problems provided the mechanism is invigorated.

### **The role played by the NSSP**

The NSSP, the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International, faced the biggest dilemma in 2005 because of the events of December 26. Many party members sympathizers and trade union members were affected by tsunami. Usually the party celebrates its anniversary on December 30 every year. The Boxing Day disaster made this very difficult.

Nevertheless, the party front liners assembled immediately after this episode and took some important decisions; how as a proletarian party we could come to the assistance of distressed people in those areas most affected.

We studied the whole situation within a few hours and took steps to mobilize the entire membership to go house to house and person to person to collect the items that were most needed such as clothes, infant milk food, tinned food and other dry rations for those who were destitute. We specifically decided that all collections would be distributed among the displaced people in Northern and Eastern provinces.

This appeal met with a resounding response and large collection followed. NSSP PB member Com N. Janagan very clearly announced to the donors that all collections would be distributed among Tamils in the Eastern province and said "I am very happy that members could collect a lot of essential items and on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 2005 the NSSP delivered their contributions to Batticaloa and Kalkudda."

At the crucial hour of desperation and destitution prevailed in the country when the unmerciful and ruthless tsunami sea waves that invaded lands of Sri Lanka, the NSSP made an appeal to the Fourth International to help and extend monetary assistance. There was a prompt response by the activists of the International.

The NSSP and the New Left Front (NLF) wish to thank with gratitude the initiative taken by the International to launch campaigns in various sections in various European countries and USA, and Japan. As a result of those vigorous campaigns the comrades of those countries have made monetary contributions and other donations. We in return toured those ruined areas and helped people who were really living in misery.

There were a large number of families whose houses were wrecked completely by the tidal waves and some of them were given temporary dwelling such as tents and huts. Others were accommodated in refugee camps.

The government imposed a rule that homes could not be rebuilt within 100 metres of the sea. This made the situation more difficult because it was impossible to acquire land further inland. This caused an undue delay in rebuilding and restructuring the areas hit by the tidal waves. The party considered the difficult situation seriously and made a decision to reconstruct partly-

damaged houses to provide dwellings for people to restart their normal life again. Under this new program we could supply building materials for in areas such Ratmalana, Moraruwa, Panadura, Ambalangoda, Hikkaduwa, Galle, Hamnbanthota, Batticaloa and some places in Trincommalee.

We also gave them financial assistance to meet expenses. Comrade M.R (Bata shoe worker) in Panadura whose house was wrecked and ruined by the Tsunami tidal waves, made an appeal to the Fund for assistance and after thorough study of this case the NSSP Tsunami Fund took a decision to make a donation of Rs.200000 which was promptly done. Health worker Com. Jayasinghe was given USD 1000 (Rs.100000) for rebuilding her house.

## **Aftermath**

While the NSSP TRF was involved in helping and assisting distressed people through various avenues, the comrades took a strenuous attitude towards the negligence and shortcoming due to utter carelessness and inefficiency in handling relief work, rebuilding and reconstruction work. We took the initiative with a parallel program against malpractices in the field of relief work by making a huge cry throughout the country through agitations, campaigns and organized public meetings that won resounding applause from all corners of the country. We managed to hold 15 meetings of this type that ended in success.

We also carried a campaign against the expulsion of fisher folk and downtrodden people who lived in lands close to the beach. The government was and is still trying to implement this program under the guise of 100-metre rule with a view to handing over those areas that are vacated to local and foreign hoteliers and tour agents to build tourist resorts for the rich.

## **Gratitude and thanks**

While praising the prompt action of the International to our request, we thank all comrades and all sections of the international and sympathizing organizations and comrades throughout the world for their kind and generous contributions. Without that which we received, the NSSP could not have helped the distressed people on such a large scale. This is a tremendous achievement.

Our fight against irregularities is not over yet. We assure you that we will combat malpractices, misappropriation of funds in general and uproot social disorder in rehabilitation work until a new social outlook is established on the ruins of the Tsunami.

The Tsunami came vigorously and with terror it took away thousands of lives and millions worth of movable and immovable wealth and property. But it taught every one of us a lesson, which is to be united. It left many nostalgic memories behind us.

The global capitalists have not hesitated to take selfish advantage of this natural disaster to achieve their ends. The capitalist class in Sri Lanka has failed to serve the Tsunami victims alike without racist discrimination. The Sri Lankan government either failed to do relief work for the people living along sea belt of Northern and Eastern province - areas are predominantly occupied by Tamils and Muslims - or deliberately left them to their fate. Due to this miserable failure Tamils have no other option than strengthen their liberation struggle.

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