



MINUTES OF MEETING

TOPIC: Technical Working Group (TWG) – Accommodation of newly displaced IDPs in Mannar District
DATE: 18th April, 2008, 3.00 p.m.
LOCATION: UNHCR Meeting Room, Colombo

ATTENDEES:

| | | |
|------------------------|------------|--|
| Charles Campbell | SCC /UNHCR | Shelter Coordinator / SCC Coordinator (National) |
| Tom Skitt | OXFAM | Public Health Advisor |
| Maja Zotovic | SOLIDAR | SCC Field Coordinator |
| Marc Andre Buenzli | SDC | Deputy Country Director |
| Massimiliano Benevelli | DRC | Emergency Coordinator |
| Julie Pharand | ICRC | Water-Habitat Coordinator |
| Imthiyas | ICRC | Water-Habitat Assistant |
| Stella Ogunlade | UNHCR | Associate Protection Officer |
| S.C.C. Elankovan | ZOA | Programme Officer |
| Nadishani Perera | ZOA | Programme Officer |
| Leslie Morris | UNICEF | WASH Emergency Specialist |
| Emilie Sakai | IOM | Project Development Officer |
| Giovanni Cassani | IOM | Emergency / Shelter Coordinator |
| Nilkanthi Naranpanawe | UNHCR | Shelter Assistant |

| REF | ITEM / DETAIL | ACTION |
|------------|--|--------|
| 1.0 | Welcome of Participants to the TWG | |
| 1.1 | The Participants were welcomed to the TWG Meeting. | |
| 1.2 | The SCC/Solidar Field Coordinator was warmly welcomed to the meeting after an absence of more than two months for her visa renewal | |
| 2.0 | Background to meeting | |
| 2.1 | The background to the meeting was explained by the SCC/UNHCR Coordinator. The issue was the GoSL change in decision re accommodation of newly arrived IDPs from LTTE controlled areas into Government controlled part of Mannar district. As of beginning of March 2008 they are being accommodated in newly constructed camps rather than according to the previously accepted and agreed ladder of options. | |
| 2.2 | As a result of the insistence of the GoSL that shelter agencies provide assistance to the IDPs in Kalimoddaï site as well as new requests from the GoSL that the assistance should be more permanent structures, it was agreed that the SCC needed to call a Technical Working group meeting, to exchange information and explore some scenarios related to the possible outcomes of the situation and recommendations that might be put forward to address the situation. | |
| 2.3 | The objective of this meeting is to share information on the current situation in the camp among the various NGOs working in the district and based on the information and inputs of the participants the SCC may come up with recommendations and guidelines that could be used by agencies | |

In partnership with



involved in implementation at this camp or any subsequent similar camp.

- 2.4 The meeting would follow the following structure: the historical background to the situation would be given describing how the situation evolved followed by an update on the current situation, after which proposals would be made on what the recommended actions would be. This would be shared with the Field and the wider SCC for inputs and comments after which it would be adopted.

3.0 Background on Kalimoddai Site

- 3.1 At the beginning of March a few displaced families from LTTE controlled areas arrived in Mannar. They were asked to relocate from host families in Mannar island to the Rice Mill Camp in Nanaddan. A few days later the GoSL indicated that due to security concerns the SLA had decided to accommodate all IDPs coming from LTTE controlled areas into IDP camps in Nanaddan DS division.
- 3.2 The site in Kalimoddai, a former Welfare Centre on private land that was closed late 2007 after 7 years of use, was identified for this purpose, by the GoSL. The site was assessed by the SCC and found to be unsuitable as it was low lying and parts of it were prone to flooding. It was also located quite close to an army installation with only one problematic access to the camp.
- 3.3 However the GoSL made the decision to develop the camp with or without the support of Humanitarian agencies. The authorities confirmed that they will clear this site and attend to the levelling and draining and urged the agencies to provide shelter and WatSan assistance.
- 3.4 It was decided by the agencies in Mannar that, as it was clear that the Authorities would construct the camp, they would be prepared to offer limited assistance in order to monitor the provision of assistance and the protection and welfare of the IDPs.
- 3.5 The assistance was provided by agencies on the understanding that: the access to the site would be guaranteed, the nature of the site would be clarified, the duration the IDPs would remain at the site would be clarified, and the right of use of the land would be legally acquired.
- 3.6 The IDPs have however clearly stated that they do not want to remain at the site for any extended period as they have families to host them. It was reported that they even provided names and addresses of host families, they could live with. They have therefore refused to send their children to school or use the communal kitchen facility provided for them as a sign of protest against staying in the camp.

4.0 Update on Kalimoddai

- 4.1 The useable part of the camp is now almost full and if any more tents are to be erected there needs to be some grading and draining of the site as it is too flooded at this time. However it is reported that it has been raining quite heavily recently and no works can be carried out at this time.
- 4.2 The ICRC mentioned that the legality of the site had been investigated by their lawyers and it was reported that in this situation the military had the authority to establish and run such a site.
- 4.3 Although access to the camp had been relaxed in the past weeks as residents were allowed to move in and out of the camp as long as they returned by 18:00 hrs, it was reported that since 17/04/08 the security forces are not allowing residents to move out of the camp. It is not clear what the reason is but it is expected that this situation would be resolved soon.
- 4.4 The IDPs are consistently making the point that they do not want to remain in the camp. They have sent letters to the Area Commander stating their desire to leave.
- 4.5 The status of Kalimoddai camp remains unclear, i.e. if a procedure would be instituted to screen residents and release them or this will be a camp for more permanent accommodation of Vanni IDPs. However, indications from the GoSL are that it is planned that these IDPs will stay in this camp for an extended period.
- 4.6 The GoSL also indicated that once Kalimoddai reaches its capacity, a new site in Sirukandal which is also next to an army camp is being proposed. When these two sites are full it is planned to accommodate the IDPs on sites in Vavuniya or Anuradhapura.
- 4.7 It was reported that sites are being considered in Vavuniya and that the new camps would be large mega camps, as the authorities prefer larger sites and are of the opinion that they will be able to have better control of the camps.

- 4.8 In addition to the already mentioned, the Emergency Coordinator of the DRC (Danish Refugee Council) also shared the latest information he had received from their Field Office in Mannar regarding the situation of the camp. Some of the issues had already been mentioned but additionally he pointed out that
- There are 3 wells in the site but none of them has drinkable water and they are used only for bathing and laundry;
 - The wells are not fenced, creating a protection concern especially for women that must take a bath at night time.
 - There are only four emergency toilets at the moment and 10 semi-permanent toilets are being repaired by Oxfam
 - The DRC has assisted in providing food and basic needs to the IDPs in this camp
- 4.9 The ICRC has provided 46 tents to date and had agreed to provide basic assistance to the displaced. They had also agreed to support the GoSL in constructing Rigid Emergency Shelters (RES) in the site as longer term accommodation. However as the IDPs refused to accept any longer term assistance and with the latest development at the site re total restriction on IDP movements out of the site, ICRC would not provide assistance until the situation is rectified.
- 4.10 It was reported that Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) had also been approached to assist in providing more permanent shelters. They initially agreed to do so but when explained the context they agreed to provide emergency shelters only when the situation permits.
- 4.11 An additional 10 families arrived on 17/04/08 bringing the current total to 87 families (204 persons) living in Kalimoddai camp.

5.0 Issues arising

- 5.1 Some agencies confirmed that they have already been approached by the GoSL to assist in developing Sirukandal Camp, but as this site is next to an Army camp in addition to the issues related to Kalimoddai Camp, this site raises much higher security concerns
- 5.2 It was raised by the SCC/Solidar Field Coordinator that agencies in the Field were already asking for guidance on how to respond to the authorities if approached for assistance to the possible new sites, especially if, as in the case of Sirukandal, security risks on the proposed sites is very high.
- 5.3 The ICRC indicated that they would not be assisting Sirukandal site as the Geneva Convention which is the main legal basis for their assistance, does not allow civilian sites to be in close proximity to military establishments. This was agreed as a valid point by all.
- 5.4 Participants unanimously agreed that as humanitarian agencies we should assist conflict displaced IDPs. However the level of assistance provided should be the basic minimum to be defined. The level of assistance should not indicate that Humanitarian Agencies are condoning activities that were not in keeping with International Humanitarian Principles.
- 5.5 It was highlighted that it is very important for agencies to be aware of the approach they used with the authorities as agencies may be perceived to always oppose the policies of the GoSL without positively contributing or suggesting a viable alternative. Agencies must be aware of the context in which they are operating (the country is fighting a war) and realise that this will consequently bring some constraints in the perceptions of the GoSL as well as international agencies.
- 5.6 It was suggested that as the SCC a certain number of things could be done, One of the proposed actions was to write a letter seeking clarification on a number of issues as discussed at the field level and/or Colombo level.
- 5.7 Another possible action could be to come up with some recommendations/strategy on the level of assistance to be given by agencies if the current situation continues. This strategy should not be finalised at Colombo level but proposed parameters and strategy should be drafted and sent to the field for input into defining what the minimum level of assistance should be.
- 5.8 UNICEF suggested that a minimum level of assistance in the WASH sector could be activities like soap distribution, emergency sanitation and bowsering of water but not longer term assistance or construction of more permanent structures.
- 5.9 DRC also suggested that as a minimum level of assistance items like basic food items, complimentary food items, emergency shelter, hygiene kits and provision of emergency shelter

could be provided. Basic health assistance could also be provided through a mobile clinic.

- 5.10 It was felt by some agencies that it was sometimes necessary to reiterate to the GoSL representatives in the Field that the role of international and local humanitarian organisations was to support the GoSL in carrying out their responsibility to protect and assist the displaced and not to shoulder the responsibility themselves.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 It was agreed that the SCC would write a letter to the Government authorities in the affected districts seeking clarification on the following issues:
- The status of the Kalimodдай Camp and consequently the type of shelter assistance to be provided
 - The location of IDP camps in the context of the contingency planning and the effect of the new procedures on previously made agreements
 - The ladder of options governing the selection of hosting options for IDPs displaced
 - *The size of camps and the GoSLs predilection for larger camps*
 - Enhancing communication between Shelter agencies the GoSL and the Sri Lankan army
- 6.2 It was agreed that an assistance strategy would be drafted by the SCC in Colombo and shared with the SCC in the Field in order to define the minimum level of assistance to be provided to IDPs in this and similar situations.
- 6.3 It was proposed and agreed that these issues be taken to the next Protection IDP Working Group meeting to be held on the 24th April at the UNHCR Office in Colombo.
- 6.4 One of the proposed advocacy strategies was to raise the visibility and awareness of Kalimodдай camp issues and it was agreed that if possible, visits of Ambassadors or UN representatives to the camp would be beneficial in this regard.
- 6.5 It was proposed that the issue be raised with the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA).
- 6.6 It was proposed that the issues related to Kalimodдай camp be raised at the next CCHA meeting. The SCC/UNHCR coordinator reported that it was raised at the last CCHA Sub committee on IDP Welfare and Resettlement by the representative of Ministry of Resettlement.
- 6.7 It was also agreed that in the event that no reply to the SCC letter was received the advocacy with the authorities at the Field and Colombo level would continue, reminding them of their agreement to implement the ladder of options and respect of the freedom of movement and the fundamental rights of displaced people.

7.0 Any Other Business

- 7.1 The SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) informed that it had been mentioned by members of some diplomatic missions that they are interested in receiving updates from the SCC every two weeks on the current issues and any issues that needed some assistance in high level advocacy.
- 7.2 The SCC/UNHCR Coordinator welcomed the idea but explained that the SCC continues to be understaffed though the situation was improving and that this initiative could not be implemented in May as the SCC needed to consolidate but the initiative would be taken up in the following month.
- 7.3 The fact that the development of some sites in Manthai West was on hold since no agency was available to issue low mine risk certificates was raised. It was suggested that the issue of the presence of de-mining agencies in the Vanni would be taken up at the Colombo level by the SCC.

8.0 Dates of Forthcoming Meetings (TWG / ESCM)

- 8.1 The TWG participants were thanked for their participation and inputs.
- 8.2 Next ESCM will be held on 28th April 2008 at 3.00 p.m. at the UNHCR Meeting Room
- 8.3 The date of the next TWG Meeting will be agreed in due course