

**Asia / Tsunami****Consult us first**

*This Statement is from the Asian Women's Consultation on Post-tsunami Challenges, held at Banda Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia, 25-27 July 2005.*

We, over 60 women, survivors of the tsunami and activists involved in the tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts, from India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Malaysia, gathered in Banda Aceh in the village of Lambaro Seibun during 25-27 July 2005, for the Asian Women's Consultation on Post-tsunami Challenges.

Seven months after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, affected women continue to be marginalized, discriminated and excluded from the process of rebuilding at all levels: the family, the community and the nation.

We met in Aceh realizing the significance and challenges women face in the tsunami aftermath:

1. Gender discrimination and women's human rights violations. Thousands of women and children in the affected countries still live in camps and other temporary facilities, which lack adequate sanitation, clean water, health services and security. Government compensations have not reached them or are insufficient to restore their livelihoods. In Thailand, women are discriminated even in death: funeral expenses paid for men's deaths are twice as much as for women's.
2. Women's right to food is violated. People are on the verge of starvation getting one meal a day. The food rations provided are of very low quality. This affects the health of children and pregnant, breast-feeding and elderly women.
3. Women suffer from increased domestic violence in camps and temporary shelters, especially in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand as a result of increased alcoholism. There is inadequate protection provided by the police and camp administration because of the general perception



of violence against women being a personal matter.

4. Children in camps and temporary shelters do not have access to education. Government scholarships are not sufficient to cover education costs. In Sri Lanka, Indonesia (Aceh) and India, schools are too far away from camps, and transport is not provided.
5. Both temporary and permanent housing facilities are of low standards in design and construction, and climatic conditions have not been taken into account; for example, it is impossible to stay in tin shelters that heat up in the tropical sun. Facilities do not meet women's needs: there are no kitchen and bathing facilities. In Sri Lanka, people remain uncertain regarding permanent housing. The Sri Lankan government's policy on buffer zone implies that fishermen and others are denied assistance in any rebuilding activities within 100-200 m from the shoreline. However, hotels and tourist resorts near the sea have been restored. In Indonesia, similar restrictions prevail, but some communities went back to their villages to rebuild their houses even though it means they will not receive government assistance. In Thailand, some permanent housing have ownership problems: houses are built by sponsors on rented land or on land owned by someone else, so some time in the future, resettled people will face eviction.

6. The tsunami exacerbated the problem of women's access to land. Women in Indonesia (Aceh) and India do not have ownership rights to land registered in their husbands' and fathers' names, as women are not recognized as heads of households. In Sri Lanka, joint ownership to land remains an unresolved issue in relation to post-tsunami reallocation of land. In Thailand, the tsunami has created new land conflicts, with big businesses claiming the land of entire communities, especially of minorities, who have lived on such land for several generations but never had land title deeds.
7. Jobs and livelihoods: In all the affected countries, women lost their jobs and livelihood sources. The governments have failed to respond effectively and survivors have to rely on non-governmental organization (NGO) support.
8. Caste and ethnic discrimination: In India, entire communities of *dalit* (so-called untouchables) and *irula* (indigenous people) have been left out of relief and rehabilitation efforts. They have not been receiving any assistance from the Indian government, as they are not seen as directly affected by the tsunami although they have lost their livelihood sources.
9. Plight of Burmese migrants in Thailand: Burmese migrants in Thailand have been completely ignored by both the Burmese and Thai governments in the tsunami aftermath. In the immediate aftermath, they could not recover dead bodies of their family members for fear of getting arrested as migrants. Since they have lost their registration/identity cards, they do not have access to government assistance and health services. As migrants, they do not have any income-generating capacity of their own, and have to rely on their employers to give them jobs, and these latter have lost their businesses in the tsunami.
10. The armed conflict situation in Indonesia's Aceh region and in Sri Lanka exacerbates the human rights situation. Child military recruitment in Sri Lanka has increased after the tsunami. The presence of armed forces inside the camps has increased the vulnerability of women to violence, and threatens their security, rather than provide protection. The military hinders the free movement of people and the distribution of relief aid.
- In the light of the above, we express grave concern about the lack of consultation with the people affected by the tsunami in the relief and reconstruction process. We demand that:
1. The governments of the affected countries and non-State actors consult and involve affected people in the process of reconstruction and rebuilding. International and national NGOs must consult with the affected communities in the planning, design and implementation of projects.
  2. We are also aware of significant foreign assistance received by the governments of the affected countries and international and national NGOs, and we demand transparency and accountability in the spending of funds.
  3. Both State and non-State agencies working with the displaced must recognize and address gender-specific and special needs of women.
  4. Recognize the needs and rights of children, the elderly, the disabled, women living with HIV/AIDS and affected women who need long-term medical and psychological treatment and assistance.
  5. The governments must immediately provide gender-disaggregated data in tsunami-affected regions.
  6. State and non-State actors in the tsunami-affected armed conflict areas must stop activities threatening the lives of the people, especially women and children. Rebuilding and reconstruction should promote peace-building efforts, especially in Sri Lanka and Aceh, Indonesia.
  7. The governments of the affected countries must ensure that relief and reconstruction activities are implemented without discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, age, migration, citizenship and other factors.

8. The governments must provide legal and financial assistance to women who have to fight for their right to land in disputes with business corporations.

The governments must recognize the rights of the fishing communities to the sea and the coastal land, and ensure that business interests in the rebuilding process do not negatively impact the livelihoods of the seashore people.

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