

Indian Ocean earthquake & tsunami: Human rights at risk in the aftermath

In the aftermath of the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, Amnesty International (AI) is monitoring the relief effort to ensure that fundamental human rights are respected. These include the principle of non-discrimination in aid provision, principles guiding protection of human rights in situations of internal displacement and the right to protection from physical or mental abuse, including violence against women.

AI is calling on all those involved in the relief effort to respect international human rights and humanitarian norms. Assistance should be provided on the basis of need, without discrimination based on the race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status of recipients.

AI is looking into reports of adverse discrimination, with a focus on groups with particular protection needs, such as indigenous and disadvantaged communities, children, migrant workers and women in vulnerable situations. The organization is also concerned that relief should not be used as cover to forcefully relocate populations, in order to clamp down on or undermine support for opposition groups. Any relocation of internally displaced persons from camps or other accommodation must be voluntary, and should not be coerced in any way, including through the suspension of assistance to those persons.

Human rights are most in jeopardy in situations of crisis and emergency. It is therefore critical that governments and other actors recognize and support the central role of human rights defenders, including those engaged in humanitarian work and those monitoring violations, in the relief and reconstruction process.

Specific areas of concern:

Aceh

Even before the earthquake/tsunami, the Indonesian province of Aceh had been seriously affected by a conflict between the armed group Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) and the Indonesian military. At least 3000 people have been killed in this conflict since the declaration of a military emergency in May 2003. Access for international humanitarian and human rights agencies was also severely restricted throughout that period. It will be important to ensure that the situation is not exploited by either party to perpetrate further human rights abuses.

AI is monitoring the Indonesian response to the current crisis, including the leading role played in relief efforts by the Indonesian military. AI is closely monitoring any alleged human rights abuses associated with the continuing conflict in Aceh.

Sri Lanka

Of particular concern are the emerging reports of sexual violence against women in camps for the displaced. AI's ongoing campaign to Stop Violence against Women has highlighted the specific risks faced by internally displaced women and the need for concrete measures to prevent sexual violence and investigate such complaints immediately, thoroughly and independently.

AI is also concerned by reports from Sri Lanka that orphaned children may be recruited as soldiers by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in the north and east of the country and is monitoring this closely. Recruitment of children by the LTTE has been a longstanding concern. The organization is continuing to appeal for an immediate halt to this practice and is urging that those children recruited to date are returned to their families or communities.

There were initially some positive signs of co-operation between the LTTE and the government; however there appears to be increasing disagreement between the two parties over the distribution of



US Navy helicopter crewmen hands out aid supplies to tsunami survivors, near Banda Aceh, Indonesia
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aid. Amnesty International is concerned that these disagreements should not delay or obstruct delivery of essential aid and continues to monitor developments.

Thailand

AI is investigating reports of harassment by the Thai police of Burmese migrants who have lost their identity cards.

Further information

Statement by Jaap Jacobson, Chair, International Executive Committee