

Dear friends and colleagues:

Tsunami relief fund: Obeyesekere appeal

One of the heartening features of the deadly Tsunami tragedy in Sri Lanka is the massive and spontaneous public response, such that even the poorest villages mustered whatever they could afford and some went in convoys to areas affected by the Tsunami paying no heed whatever to ethnic and religious differences. The good side of ordinary human beings surfaced although Sri Lanka too has had its share of ghouls parasitic on human suffering. While that suffering cannot be measured statistically, it is worth remembering that Sri Lanka is a small island of only 24,000 square miles and that over two-thirds of its populous coastline was affected, over 40,000 died and about a million according to current guesstimates were rendered homeless or suffered drastic losses. And the number of missing persons is increasing by the day. The population of the nation is estimated at about 19,000,000 and this means that one in nineteen people have been rendered homeless, suffered the trauma, the loss of loved ones, homes and property. Beyond this is the enshrouding pain of friends and relations and everyone else sensitive to the suffering of others. Whole towns in the east coast and south have been nearly wiped out. A striking feature of the current situation is that the overwhelming number of the dead comes from the most vulnerable segment of society, namely women and children.

What does one do in this situation? Nations have come in generously to help the Sri Lankan government to restore the infrastructures destroyed by the deluge and there have been a great many relief agencies that have sprung into action, some with impeccable past records, some with more enthusiasm than ideas while others have no public accountability procedures, and a few are out and out fraudulent enterprises. The need is great to reach out to those affected, not just in the short run but in the long run in order to bring a measure of enduring relief. I am sure there are many worthwhile NGOs whom some of you might have already contacted and helped. For my part I have identified two institutions that in my view have impeccable public records and are run by people of unimpeachable integrity. These two institutions also have public accountability procedures, will account for every penny they receive and also give the donors a clear idea of how the money has been spent. They have ready built administrative structures in place already and will not charge any overhead costs.

The first of these is the Center for Women's Research (CENWOR) run by a group of professionals including past professors in the several universities in Sri Lanka. You can get detailed information about them from their website (www.cenwor.lk). Cenwor is a non-profit organization that has an established reputation for research on women and gender issues and those of children.

Cenwor has already established links with NGOs working in the Tsunami affected areas, two each in the South, North and East. There is a multitude of problems facing displaced women and orphaned children, such as provision of temporary and permanent homes and indeed a rethinking of the kind of homes and orphanages required in this special situation.

The other organization I have identified is the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (NTT), named after the Harvard educated human rights activist assassinated a few years ago, one of the truly great human beings that Sri Lanka has produced. The trust also has a board of professionals of impeccable repute and is dedicated to “peace, reconciliation and human rights.” The Tiruchelvam trust has established a separate Tsunami fund, independent of the trust and directed entirely to helping Tsunami victims. A special website will soon be created and we will keep you informed of it.

Both CENWOR and the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust have agreed to accept funds that I might solicit on their behalf. They will keep such funds in a separate category (“Obeyesekere appeal”) and acknowledge every single donor on a special page on their website. Both funds will not directly deal with the provision of assistance; they will channel funds to trustworthy organizations out there in the affected areas doing relief work. They have agreed for me to have an input in selecting projects and target areas where help might be needed. Funds should be sent directly to CENWOR or NTT to their respective bank accounts. However, send a note or email with it to CENWOR and NTT to indicate the following: the sum donated and that your contribution is in response to the “Obeyesekere appeal” so that the money could be placed in a special category over which I have some control. If you have any questions regarding this appeal do email me to: sekere@princeton.edu

I recommend that you give generously to one or both of these two organizations, if you haven't already made a contribution to any other Tsunami fund or in addition to what you might have already contributed. I want to avoid grandiosity and instead focus on specific projects that have long term validity. Simple ones would be finding safe locations for displaced women and children and gainful employment for the former. More ambitiously: I know of young professionals who are focusing on one village at a time trying to build houses for those who have lost their homes and reconstructing villages with careful overall planning sensitive to their needs. There are others but the bottom line is that the projects be feasible and clearly targeted. If you want to help with women's and children's issues you might want to donate funds to CENWOR. To help with specific targeted village rehabilitation projects, please send the funds to the Neelan Tiruchelvam trust fund, Tsunami relief. The address of CENWOR is:
225/4 Kirula Road, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.
Phone: (94) 11 2369530
Email: cenwor@slt.net
Bank: Commercial Bank of Ceylon, Narahenpitiya Branch

Kirula Road, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka

Account number: 1220007172

Swift code: CCEYLK LX

The address of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (NTT) is:

108/1 Rosmead Place

Colombo 7

Sri Lanka

Phone (94) 11 2697694

Email: nttrust@diamond.lanka.net

Their Tsunami relief fund is named "The NTT Relief and Reconstruction Account"

Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation

51 A Dharmapala Mawatha

Colombo 3

Account number: 003-058120-026

Swift code: HSBC lkx

Whatever contribution you can make to one or both of these funds either as individuals or as groups or organizations will be deeply appreciated. You might also be able to identify persons or organizations that might help us. I will personally guarantee that the money will be creatively used for specific projects.

Gananath Obeyesekere

Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus

Princeton University

9 January, 2005

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