
OfERR Round Table Newsletter

20th February 2009

The OfERR round table was held at the Brothers of the Holy Cross conference room. Day one witnessed the sector wide presentations made by the various representatives. Some of the partners made presentations on their field visits to the camps, highlighting their observations as well as some valuable feedback. During the evening session the Special commissioner for Rehabilitation Mr. Mohan Pyare graced the occasion by providing inputs on the Central and State Governments role in the welfare of the Ceylon Tamil Refugees.

The day was started and ended brightly with Refugee songs being sung by the OfERR staff and volunteers.

Morning Session: Focus on India programme 2007-08:

The morning session was chaired by Mr. Gurung Naba. The OfERR song “One day peace will blossom” was sung short of the introductions made by one and all present.

Presentation by Mr. Chandrahasan:



Mr. Chandrahasan made a presentation which shed light on the work of OfERR India in the context of the existing Situation, Challenges faced by OfERR and OfERR’s response to these challenges. The presentations covered a lot of ground starting from the outbreak of hostilities in the Island, to the apprehensions within the entire Tamil Community regarding the effects of the war on the people and leading to the campaign on the right of protection. This presentation set the mood for the remainder of the day.

Sector wise presentations:

The session shifted focus to the presentations on the work of the various sectors. Short of the presentations Mr. Laurent very aptly put the view across that the round table should be considered a good opportunity to “touch base on the future” direction of OfERR and its supporting partners.

Mr. Kushal Chaired the second session in which the presentations commenced.



Presentation on the Basic Needs and Infrastructure Sector:

The Basic Needs and Infrastructure section presentation highlighted some challenges such as high unemployment and Influx of new refugees. Involving the refugees in working towards their own welfare was an excellent strategy employed by them. The presentation was concluded with the futures plans, one of which was building an economically sustainable self reliant society.

The question was raised on the relevance of state level committees. The answer to which was affirmative, sighting empowerment of the people and providing ownership.

Presentation on the Women's Empowerment:



The Women's Empowerment sector is an essential part of OfERR's work. This presentation spoke of the problems faced by the refugee women. It made known the deep sense of insecurity which exists among the women and also the various measures taken such as the increased role of women in the refugee society. Imparting skills for development was seen as a major way forward for Women's Empowerment.

Presentation on Education Sector:

The Education Sector presentation emphasized on the fact, that through education much can be gained by the refugee community both in India and on return. The efforts of this sector have ensured that the otherwise right less refugees can access education on an equal footing with the Indian students. The future plan involved the use of the received education as means to achieving peace and rebuilding the homeland.



Presentation on Health Sector:



The Health Sector presentations covered the Nutrition, Medical and Counselling components. The 3 components combined to ensure the mental and physical health of the refugees. The future plans prioritized the ensuring of maternal and child health, combating epidemics and facilitating sound mental health among the refugees.

The session was concluded with the tea break. Mr. Kushal concluded it by saying that "when going to the camp we see that they all (Ceylon Tamil Refugees) want peace and that is seen in the eyes of the children as well".

Presentations Post Tea:

Presentation on the Human Resource Sector:

The Human Resource Sector presentation focused on the need and methods of converting the human potential of the refugees as vehicles of peace and development. One of the main focuses was on bringing the deviant youth to the mainstream. The trainings and humanitarian measures were seen as doing the youth good.



Presentation on the Advocacy Sector:



The Advocacy Sector presentation illustrated how it works with the Governments of India, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka for the rights and well being of the refugees. Advocacy has supplemented the work of all the other sectors. It has made it possible for refugees to educate themselves and seek employment while in India. As a measure for the future it aims at ensuring that all the Stateless Ceylon Refugees be granted Citizenship while in India so that they can return with full dignity to the Island.

Mr. Gordon added that the Advocacy Sectors work is done both locally and internationally.

Presentation on the Tsunami Unit:

The Tsunami work has seen the refugees helping the host Indian Community. The highlight was perhaps the fact that the locals who were badly affected by the 2005 Tsunami were prepared by OfERR and its partners in methods of Disaster Risk Reduction which stood them in good stead post the 2008 floods. The future plan of this sector focuses on working for the betterment of socially/economically excluded communities (Dalits, Tribals, Women and Farm Labour).



Presentation on Income Generation:



This presentation showed how OfERR has been using Spirulina Cultivation, Mushroom Cultivation, Solar power, Herbal medicine production, Organic Farming and Skills training (tailoring etc) to promote livelihood while keeping the environment in mind. This sector promotes financial, environmental and health benefits among the refugee and host communities.

Short of lunch the stirring Film called ‘Rising from the ashes’ made by OfERR Ceylon was shown.

Post Lunch Session

Presentation on the work of OfERR Ceylon:

The presentation by OfERR Ceylon shed light on the work being done within the Island. The uniqueness of this presentation and the questions that followed were highlighted by the fact that the work being done is extended to all communities in Ceylon regardless of religion or ethnicity. This is being done to promote peace in the Island. Certain points came to the fore raising much awareness on the pros and cons of the happenings in the Island.



Visits by the Partners to the field:



Mr. Charles of Dan Church Aid visited the Minur and Chinapallikuppam camps. He observed both the needs and the work undertaken in these areas. He found that that in Chinapallikuppam the school was very impressive. He expressed his happiness on being taken to the camps.

Mr. Nagulan visited 2 camps in erode. He

was witness to the activities put up. He observed that in the camps where there were new refugees' lack of space was a problem and in the camps where there were older refugees return to the island was primary focus of concern.



Mr. John Ball in addition visiting the Nallayan farm also visited 4 camps. He stressed on the fact that OfERR has been able to work along with Government on many areas and the Government in Turn has been very generous. He brought about the question pertaining to the work rights of the refugees in certain areas where there is little or no scope for them



The Special Commissioner for Rehabilitation:

The Special Commissioner for Rehabilitation spoke of the generous contributions made by the Indian authorities towards the well being of the refugees over the last 25 years. He very correctly mentioned that the refugees were not discriminated in India in any way and were given the best possible support. The support has been provided taking much care of the fact that the goodwill between the refugees and the Indian Community be maintained to prevent placing them (refugees) in a vulnerable position.

He also praised the work done by OfERR as he had no doubt that they are doing an excellent job.



Closing note by Mr. Chandrahasan:



Mr. Chandrahasan was very appreciative of the assistance provided to the refugees by the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Government of India. He was also appreciative of the fact that from the time Mr. Mohan Pyare took office he has dealt with the refugee situation taking into considerations the human being and human relations. The treatment of refugees as relatives or members of the family rather than as guests shows the positive stand of the Indian government.

With the conclusion of Mr. Chandrahasan's words the session was closed for the day.

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