

Date: 1-1-2005.

From
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To
With Special kind attention to: Mr.Madhav Ranganathan,
Mr.Ananthakrishnan (Asha for Education), Ms.Mary Lania (UUSC),
Ms.Stefania Brocchid (Humanist Movement) Rev.Claudia (NCC – J),
Ms.Rajyashree (Chruch World Service), Ms.Kanyare (Sister Fund). Tacoma
groups, Anglican Church Groups. Shannon (D'Min) Mr.Wilfred (INSAF).

My dear sisters and brothers, abroad and domestic,

New Year Greetings.

It was very unfortunate, that 2004, ended with such a kind of unimaginable threat to the survival of the weaker section of humanity. Yes I am talking about the tsunami, that brought in death and destruction among the marginalized sections of community – fisherfolk and other marginalized communities living in the Coastal areas, of TamilNadu, India on 26th of December, 2004.

Losing the loved ones, in many cases almost all, losing the belongingness, and above all losing all sources for survival just within a few seconds, in a most frightening and horrible way is the most unfortunate thing, a human being can come across in her/his life, in the span of one's life time. This exactly has happened to thousands and thousands of human beings, in a heart breaking way, on 26th of December in Chennai and the surrounding Coastal places in TamilNadu and Pondicherry in India.

Life had become a shattered dream to thousands of women, children and men, who now are pushed to the open ground with sky as roof and blankness, disillusionment, insecurity and trauma as future. In this context, we have come before you with an open appeal and we would be more happy to respond to your different queries, in this regard.

Life is open, and is fragile for all. If we still believe in humanity, and a peaceful living for the whole of cosmos, inclusive of human beings and Nature, I think that it is time for us to think right and concentrate on rebuilding the broken humanity in a sustainable way and to rebuild the structures of life as Nature friendly and Life friendly, so that tomorrow Nature and Human beings could complement each other and not destroy each other.

FORWORD, as a team of socially sensitized humanbeings and organizations and backed by Indian Social Action Forum – a Nation wide collection of more than 500 people’s organizations challenges you to action and to show yours solidarity for the cause of the deprived, for their Right to Life.

FORWORD puts before you the following request:

1. Your valuable suggestions for building up confidence and courage in the minds of the victimized to further proceed their life.
2. Your visit to the affected areas, extending solidarity to the victimized at times of their conflict.
3. Valuable means of support in kinds like providing boats, nets, boat machines, roofs, house utensils etc.,
4. School notes, books, pen, pencil and other educational equipments to school going children, who have lost all their school related materials.
5. Cash donations (could be in the respective currency of your own country) to be used for the sustainable rehabilitation of the victimized with human dignity and social security. To put up counselling centres in order to heal the wounded psychies of women forms a priority.

The donations could be made to he following address in the following detail.

Name of the Account Holder: Forum for Women’s Rights and Development, (FORWORD).

Account Number: 36411.

Name of the Bank: Indian Overseas Bank.

Address: Mudichur road,
West Tambram,
Chennai 600059.

(FORWORD is registered under FCRA of India).

I request you to come forward to pick up the issues of these victimized humanity and to show our solidarity to them.

We are open for any enquiry in this regard.

Awaiting your response.

M.ShiamalaBaby.

Encl: A short report about Tsunami that torn apart the lives of thousands of people in Tamilnadu:

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26th of December 2004, dawned silently like all the other mornings. It was so with the Coastal areas of TamilNadu. But, on that Sunday's morning, all on a sudden, from Marina Beach, Chennai and down to the Coastal areas of Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and then down south to Colachel, the coastal area on the West side of Kanyakumary, tip of India, things changed for worst. In no time, the sea, in a sudden ferocious way rose high and got into the land covering two to three kilometres of areas with its waterynet. In this process thousands of people were taken off unaware, into the fold of the sea and killed.

When, we visited the affected coastal areas from Chennai to Mahabalipuram, the same evening, and the following days, the whole area gave a painful feeling on how the already deprived and the marginalized communities like the fisherfolk, gets more and more victimized during such calamities, may be natural or humanmade. All the areas remained like deserted battlefields with broken buildings, deadbodies, carcasses of animals, uprooted trees and deserted and lone houses and huts. The fishing boats could be seen damaged and lying in different faraway areas up to one to two kilometres away from the sea. The fishingnets were also seen lying in a stranded way. There was cries and wailings everywhere due to the destruction made by the tsunami. Women who were seen in hundreds of numbers in the temporary relief sheds were weak and looked traumatized. Children looked frightened and were lying on the ground. Only a few young men were seen walking here and there, thoroughly broken down and in despair.

Here is the story of Ganesan, from Karikattukuppam, an affected coastal area near Chozinganallur. "I am Ganesan. I am thirtytwo years old. We are born and live in this Coastal Kuppam - (village). This sea is our mother. She is our livelihood and the sustainer of our life. Since we are born here and play in the Sea, right from our Childhood, we could understand the various signs that are seen in the Sea, denoting various weather meanings. But on this particular day, 26-12-2004, the sea was calm and nothing special could be seen. All on a sudden around 9 a.m, the sea roared ferociously and in no time we were engulfed with seawater. We the people from 300 houses of this Kuppam got into it without a way to escape. We shouted in panic. But within seconds, the water came to our neck height. In fear and frustration we held our children on top of our heads and tried to escape. We carried on top the elderly and the sick. But then, the walls of some of the houses fell down killing 5 children and one adult on the spot. We had no time to tarry. We struggled for our life and then ran to the open place. Our elders say that they have never experienced such a terrible face of this Sea before, in their

lifetime. This is the first time, the provider sea has turned to be our destructor.

Now, we are on the street, literally. The children and women had been put up to stay in the near by school building for night. Daytime, they stay in the temporarily put up open camps. “We stay in the open Camps. We are at the mercy of you all, because, we are deprived of all our means of survival. We have nothing to live on”. So saying he wept bitterly. The trauma was still on his face.

Kumar was in tears, when he said, “we have lost everything. Our fishing boats are completely damaged. The fishing nets completely destroyed. We are deprived of our means of livelihood, by this disaster. We never own any land and we do not know any other employment rather than fishing for survival. All we own is our Mother, this sea. Now she has disowned us. Where can we go? What is our future?” He was in full frustration.

In all the Coastal areas, the most affected are the already deprived community of the fisherfolk. But in Chennai, when the sea swelled off in the early morning hours of 26th of December, it has devoured persons, who were involved in the morning exercises like walking and yogas, who belong to the elite society. It was a full moon night, the previous night and hence some people came to the Marina beach to worship the Sun God. Sadly they were all killed by the Sea water.

Selvam, who belongs to Kanathur, another affected coastal area, said “the sea was troubled from 9a.m. to 2.30 p.m. on 26-12-2004. Again and again the attack occurred. We were completely shaken up. The whole Kuppam was in wailing. We struggled hard for our escape. Still, all could not be saved. I saw two of our villagers dying under the fall of the wall. Still many are missing. We have lost everything. Our boats, nets and houses are all damaged. In this Kuppam, we owned 45 boats. Each boat cost about 60,000 to 80,000/- rupees. The engine costs around Rs.40,000/-. There are different sizes of nets to suit to the catch of different fish. They differently cost ranging from Rs.15,000/-. Apart from this, we owned more than 100 cattumarams (traditonal fish catching wood). In short, a minimum of Rs.1,00,000 to 1,20,000/- rupees is needed to get a moderate fishing boat. What can we do now? We have lost everything. I do not know, how we are going to start our life a new. We stand bare, losing everything except our body and soul. Our future looks bleak”. On saying this, he became silent, silent in a deadly manner.

When we visited Reddikuppam another area of destruction, Sekar, a leader of that area pointed out to the broken stone walls and said that they

belong to two big buildings of prawn hatcheries and said, that the destruction of life came to minimum because of these two huge buildings. The waters beat against the buildings before it could fell the buildings down and thus helped the people with a few minutes to runaway for life. He added that because this particular day was Sunday morning, the majority of men stayed back home and did not go to sea. This again had minimized the death rate.

Muthu, a fisherman added, "there are 300 houses in our Kanathur Kuppam. When the water came in, we were caught up in terrible fear. We tried to run but we could not. The power of the sea over powered us. We tried to catch hold of something solid and escape. We went on shouting for help." Shakir, continued, "I am Shakir. We live in Bilal Nagar, which is next to this Kuppam. We belong to Muslim community. When we became alert to the situation in the coastal areas, we ranto the help of these people, forgetting about our own safety. We helped the Women, children, elderly and the sick to escape. But still, we could not save all. Two men died infront of our very eyes, when the walls of this prawn hatcheries fell down." Mohan, another person belonging to the fishermen community of Kanathur said in agony, "may be we belong to different communitites, like Muslims, Hindus and Christians. But we lived in harmony. In our moments of distress, our Muslim brothers came to our rescue. No government came to save us, though we had been struggling from 8.30 in the morning to the whole of morning and afternoon. We as local communities helped each other, in our limited ways of solidarity and strength. Even, when all these happened, we did not get any help from the government side, not even a single waterpacket. The police came to the spot, in the evening and that too they stood away, from the areas of attack, may be in fear."

It was said that in Kanathur, the fisherfolk owned 60 to 70 boats. Now all the boats are destroyed not even a single boat survived.

Children:

In all the affected coastal areas, the children had lost all their School books and other related educational materials. Since, this is holiday time, they remain in the relief camps. The immediate need for them is to get schooling materials in order to continue their studies, once the schools reopen after the holidays in the first week of January, 2005. In all the camps, the children look frightened and that shows that they are still under the trauma of the event of Tsunami.

Camps:

There are hundres of relief camps stretching through out the affected coastal areas in TamilNadu. Women are put up in a most helpless way due to the enormous number of the inmates. The basic facilities are very limited and the possibility to different epidemics are highly felt.

Women:

Women in the camps look throughly shattered and fatigued. They repeat only one slogan, "What is our future look like? We have lost all our means of survival". Kamala staying in one of the relief camps near Neelankarai, while describing about the experience says "we are so afraid, we can not imagine to go back and live in our houses any more. The experience has destroyed us completely, emotionally, physically and economically. We have lost our livelihood resources and the lives of our dear ones. We need the healing of our feelings and bodies".

Immediate relief and permanent sustenance:

As part of relief work, clothes, food packets, medicines etc, are pouring in from all sides. But the victimized ones are not looking at them in a serious way.

The big question that stands before them is about their sustainable future. They want, in the course of time to start their life anew and to live in independency with human right and human dignity.

Tsunami has left thousands of people homeless and hopeless. It is a long way to instill hope in their hearts and to help them to start their life afresh.

Our intervention in this crisis:

Forum for Women's Rights and Development (FORWORD), along with its like minded people's action groups and women's action groups is concentrating on the issues of sustainability of life in the life of women and children, in its primary place and then the social, economical and emotional development of the whole community. "Sustainability and not the immediate relief" is the repeated slogan of men and women with whom we have interacted. Keeping this in mind FORWORD has started a resource and information centre in the following address. A committee has been set up to look into the whole issue and to monitor and ensure, the sustainability of life, in the lives of the Tsunami affected.

In order to sharpen our activities, we have decided to take up the cause of the affected people within limited areas. Thus people who fall from the areas of Marina to Mahabalipuram covering 15 affected coastal areas would be concentrated by our interventions. In our exhaustive and comprehensive interaction with the majority of the attacked areas in TamilNadu, we found out that the areas in between Marina and Mahabalipuram are sidelined and neglected, when the question of relief attention comes. Hence, steps would be taken up to reestablish human dignity and social justice in the lives of the people who would be covered.

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Report by FORWORD.