



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

SRI LANKA - Civil Strife

Data

Date: August/September 1977 (FY 77)

Location: Throughout Sri Lanka; most of the displaced persons eventually relocated in the north near Jaffna

No. Dead: 140

No. Injured: 50 seriously; several thousand less seriously

No. Homeless: 6,000

No. Affected: 1,000,000

Damage: An unknown number of houses and businesses were destroyed; approximately 15,000 buildings were damaged

The Disaster

Ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese (68% of the population) and the Tamils (22%) has been a long-standing problem in Sri Lanka. In August 1977, disorders started in Jaffna, an overwhelmingly Tamil area in the north. The trouble apparently started when Sinhalese police got into an altercation at a local Tamil bazaar. Police in Jaffna are predominately Sinhalese and relations between the police and the local population had been deteriorating. The incident sparked rumors that Sinhalese had been attacked and killed by Tamils. On the basis of these rumors, the Sinhalese forcefully retaliated against the Tamils. In the principal cities, gangs of young Sinhalese burned and looted Tamil shops and homes.

The government brought the situation under control by imposing a rigidly enforced curfew, and by using the military to provide security in the affected areas. No emergency was declared and all governmental actions were taken in accordance with ordinary civil law. When calm was restored, the government found that many Tamils who had fled to the north and east

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for safety preferred to remain there. Approximately 4,000 chose to remain in temporary camps until they could be resettled.

Action Taken by the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL)

As soon as the problem of displaced persons arose, the GSL established camps in public buildings for those whose homes had been destroyed or who felt threatened by further violence. Free transportation was provided for persons to be evacuated to safer areas. Sinhalese residents stationed or working in Jaffna were provided transportation to their homes in the south. The GSL set up camps for the displaced persons throughout the country and launched a mass feeding campaign, serving an estimated 500,000 people.

Security, medical assistance, and other essential services were also provided at the camps by the GSL Department of Social Services. The operation and supervision of the camps were conducted by a Citizen's Committee composed of representatives of service organizations and religious groups. The GSL also provided each displaced family with a monetary allowance sufficient to move from the camps. Victims who were citizens were offered land on which they could resettle; non-citizens were helped in their search for new employment.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

Following a request from the GSL, the U.S. Ambassador notified the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) that he had made a disaster determination on September 24, 1977, permitting the use of the \$25,000 Ambassador's emergency authority. The donation was presented to the Department of Social Services through the Chairman of the GSL's Relief Committee on October 28, 1977.....\$25,000

A disaster relief officer from OFDA arrived in Sri Lanka on October 7 and departed on October 24. Traveling with local U.S. Information Service personnel, the OFDA officer visited many of the camps for disaster victims, assessed emergency needs, helped coordinate the relief effort, and demonstrated the use of disaster relief supplies.....\$4,475*

The USG coordinated and financed an airlift of 60,000 lbs. of disaster relief supplies which arrived on a chartered Boeing 707 on October 9. These supplies consisted of 298 tents and tent flies; 5,880 muslin sheets; 14,138 cotton blankets, 5-1,500 gallon water jugs; 800,000 tetracycline capsules; and one million tablets each of chloroquine and multi-vitamins. The total value, including transportation, was \$741,717. A supplemental obligation was made to cover \$40,538 in further transportation costs.....^{170,800}\$782,255

TOTAL \$811,730

* \$440 of this amount was carried over into FY 1978.

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Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies**

CARE - provided 1,200 lbs. of dried peas and 7,000 lbs. of split navy beans from in-country stocks to camps near Colombo; estimated value \$1,195.

Church World Service - contributed \$3,000 in response to an appeal by CICARWS.

Seventh-day Adventist World Service - shipped 85,874 lbs. of clothing and 1,805 lbs. of first-aid kits and supplies to Sri Lanka; in addition, \$9,000 was made available for disaster assistance.

TOTAL \$13,195

Assistance Provided by the International Community**

International Organizations

International Committee of the Red Cross - donated \$26,585 in cash.

League of Red Cross Societies - airlifted approximately \$16,700 worth of medical supplies to help meet a local Red Cross appeal.

World Health Organization - sent medical supplies, value not reported.

Governments

Canada - donated \$5,715 to the GSL relief fund.

Federal Republic of Germany - made a \$43,000 grant for reconstruction of houses.

India - donated \$9,238 to the GSL relief fund.

Voluntary Agencies

Save the Children Fund of Norway - donated \$35,435 in cash.

World Council of Churches (WCC/CICARWS) - contributed \$10,000 to the Citizen's Committee in Jaffna for disaster aid and resettlement.

TOTAL \$146,673

** Please note: the figures for total U.S. voluntary agency and international assistance are an approximation. In many cases, the cash value of in kind is unavailable.