

## **Press Release: Two years later, report highlights grave lapses in post-tsunami rehabilitation**

New Delhi, 15 December, 2006

-Acute absence of people's participation in rehabilitation processes, especially permanent housing

-Around 50 – 60% of survivors still living in temporary shelters

-Need for urgent adoption and implementation of human rights standards

December 26, 2006 will mark two years since the Indian Ocean tsunami ravaged several countries, destroyed thousands of lives, homes and livelihoods, and displaced millions of people. Two years later, despite the numerous actors involved and the multiple processes underway, rehabilitation is far from adequate or complete.

The Housing and Land Rights Network – South Asia Regional Programme's latest fact-finding mission report to the tsunami-affected areas of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry highlights grave lapses in post-tsunami rehabilitation. The report: *Do People's Voices Matter? The Human Right to Participation in Post-tsunami Housing Construction* was launched at a press conference in the capital today.

Commenting on the painfully slow pace of rehabilitation across Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry where around 50 – 60% of tsunami survivors are still living in temporary shelters, Miloon Kothari, UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing said that, "the failure to comply with human rights standards had deepened the human-induced tragedy already afflicted on survivors." Based on findings in the report, he pointed out that permanent housing where provided, fell short of international human rights standards of adequate housing and gender equality. Worse still, housing had not factored in specific needs of children, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups. The failure to include women in planning processes had resulted in gender-insensitive outcomes while violating their human rights to housing, security, privacy, participation and livelihood.

The report, while assessing the situation of housing in the tsunami affected areas from a human rights perspective, focuses on people's participation in the planning and implementation of rehabilitation programmes. "In most cases, the glaring inadequacies in permanent housing, such as the lack of space for bathing and cooking, were a direct result of the failure to consult with people," said Shivani Chaudhry of the Housing and Land Rights Network. People's specific cultural and livelihood related needs had also been disregarded in several housing sites in Kanyakumari and Nagapattinam. Many of those living in temporary shelters, still had no information regarding when or where they would be allotted permanent housing.

The report asserts that one of the major failures of the government has been its abdication of responsibility in ensuring strict adherence to human rights standards and constitutional guarantees in the implementation of rehabilitation programmes. Despite the magnitude of destruction and number of lives affected, the state of Tamil Nadu does not have a comprehensive rehabilitation policy in place and has done little to implement the National Disaster Management Act, 2005.

While raising several critical questions regarding the nature, process and pace of rehabilitation, the report also documents the few participatory processes that have been adopted with a view to ensuring that some of the lapses do not occur again.

Among other recommendations, the authors stressed the need for the following measures:

- development of enforceable timelines for completion of rehabilitation to ensure that housing, essential services, and livelihoods are restored within a specified timeframe;
- need for transparent practices and measures to ensure accountability of all actors;
- establishment of grievance redressal mechanisms;
- need for all involved actors to adopt adequate participatory and consultative mechanisms during all stages of rehabilitation to guarantee that survivors' human rights to life, livelihood, adequate housing, food, water, health, education, security, equality, participation and information are respected and fulfilled.