

Civil Society Groups Call for Resettlement of all Communities in Musali

While welcoming the Government's initiative to resettle Musali Division in Mannar District, we the undersigned civil society groups call upon the Government to take effective measures to ensure that all communities originating from the area, be they Tamils or Muslims should be resettled together so as to promote coexistence.

The Government initiated the Musali resettlement on April 30 2009 in Saveriyarpuram, numbering 122 families (105 Tamil Catholics, 10 Tamil Hindus and 07 Muslims). The Government with the assistance of a number of mine clearance organisations have carried out de-mining with the UNDP certifying a number of areas. Return to these areas will take place in a phased manner. It has been reported that on May 11th a further 4 villages (Pottkerny, Koolakulum, Ahaththimurippu and Pandaraveli) will be resettled.

It appears that all the IDPs who will be resettled during these phases are those displaced in September 2007 and currently living in Mannar District, effectively delaying the resettlement of IDP families displaced from Musali currently living in other districts. Prior to the military operations in September 2007 some 147 Muslims families had resettled in the division. Following the military operations 36 of whom moved to Rasoolputhuvveli in Nanattan DS division in Mannar but the majority settled temporarily in camps in Puttalam District but have not been informed that they will be immediately resettled. There are also long-term displaced such as the Muslims forcibly expelled from Musali in 1990. It is estimated that there a few thousand families from Musali who are living in displacement in Puttalam, Kurunegala and Anurdhapura. The initial step of resettling only displaced people living within the Mannar District has created significant and unnecessary fears among the expelled Muslims who are concerned that there will be serious repercussions especially in terms of land ownership issues unless steps are taken to avert such a situation and to allow them to resettle. **We call upon the authorities to ensure that all families originating from Musali and who were displaced from the division should be allowed to resettle.**

Prior to 1990 Musali was a multiethnic area, home to Muslims and Tamils, both Catholic and Hindus. It was the only Muslim majority divisional secretariat in the North with some 3,925 families of which 3,275 families were Muslims. As a result of the LTTE's forcible expulsion in October 1990 the Muslims were forced to leave. A majority of Musali's expelled Muslims yearn to return but like many long-term displaced communities are holding out for a sustainable peace when they will not be re-displaced. In the interim, the scrub jungle has taken over, buildings lie in waste, demarcations between individual properties have become virtually indistinguishable and new claims to land ownership have been made. In addition to this, returnees have security concerns and are nervous that the resettlement process may not be equitable to all communities.

Musali has suffered significantly as a result of the war, hence communities have multiple experiences of displacement and violence. Numerous families, mainly Tamil and a few Muslim, who were living in the Musali Division were forced into displacement in September 2007 and have been living mainly in camps or with host families. Living on

rations and restricted livelihood opportunities in unfamiliar and uncomfortable environment this displaced community has been determined to return and rebuild their homes, livelihoods and communities. The conflict has also stymied development, with only limited infrastructure development, hence there is a need to improve transport, health, education and irrigation facilities.

The Government and humanitarian actors have taken key steps to supporting families who are being resettled in Musali, but we are concerned that if the resettlement does not proceed in a manner that promotes coexistence it could create new set of problems.

We call upon the Government, humanitarian agencies, religious institutions and local actors to take steps to ensure that

- All communities originating from and displaced from Musali are incorporated into this current phase of resettlement. Special measures may need to be taken to inform and transport the expelled Muslims from their current displacement sites.
- Each phase of resettlement should ensure equitable assistance and access to resources.
- Go-and-See visits which are currently being carried out by the Government need to incorporate members of the expelled Muslim Community.
- There should be a free flow of information on this resettlement and coordinated effort to register the Musali Muslims who wish to return and who are currently live in Puttalam, Anuradhapura and Kurunagalle.
- A peace and coexistence committee is created with respected individuals representative of Musali's ethnic make up who can take up and mediate issues such as land conflicts.
- Assistance to be provided at the level of the family, the community and the division to ensure an effective rehabilitation and development of the area.
- Priority should be given to revive the livelihoods of returnees to make return sustainable. While livelihood support is key, the Government needs to balance security considerations with measures to support livelihoods such as relaxing fishing restrictions and for the opening of the Puttalam –Mannar road.
- The Musali Resettlement we hope will be followed by resettlement in the rest of the North, once the security situation improves of all communities who once lived there,

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Signatories

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