

A FOCUS ON PEACE: GUIDELINES FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF CHA

The Peace Process Recent political developments in Sri Lanka have advanced the possibilities for a sustainable peace. In February 2002 the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), signed a ceasefire agreement, and have, since September 2002 held four sets of talks in the first round, three in Bangkok and one in Oslo, facilitated by the Norwegian Government. Additional rounds of negotiations are planned for 2003.

In May 2002 the leadership of the LTTE and the SLMC signed an agreement which was to turn a new chapter in Muslim – Tamil relations. The LTTE apologized for the wrongs committed against the Muslims, recognized their distinct identity, a shared homeland in the East, and promised to solve all outstanding issues amongst them.

As an outcome of the Oslo talks the Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) was set up with a Secretariat in Kilinochchi to identify the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of the North East and to coordinate resource assistance.

This transitional environment, whilst moving purposefully, has still to deal with many uncertainties. They stem from the fears, hopes and aspirations of all the communities in Sri Lanka and specifically in the North and the East.

The CHA, in preparing for the new era has developed a strategic plan recently. It now wants to build on this plan and provide for guidelines in meeting issues that lie ahead while focussing on peace.

The Peace Process and the Humanitarian Community

Sri Lanka is at present in a no-war no-peace situation. With the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement multiple tracks have been set in motion. Issues of peace preparedness, conflict reduction, conflict-sensitive programming, post-conflict planning, recovery and reconstruction have been brought to the fore. The Sri Lankan Government, LTTE, political parties, business community, international and local non-governmental organisations and other civil society groups are currently exploring their options and capacities to respond to the challenges and opportunities that the emerging peace process will bring.

The humanitarian community now faces many challenges and concerns.

- If Sri Lanka is at a no-war no-peace situation should the humanitarian community shift completely to reconstruction and development work or should it maintain contingency plans for a reversal to war scenario? Is it equipped and resourced to make such a shift which may mean rethinking and reformulating mandates and interventions, altering to new policies and practices, forming new working relationships and linkages with new actors, and retraining its staff?
- What will happen to the peace process should international interest in Sri Lanka wane? This would also raise questions of funding.

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Response of CHA

The Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies brings together a broad constituency of local and international organisations and funding agencies involved in emergency relief, rehabilitation, development, democracy, justice, peace and human rights. It is actively involved in managing information and has established good relations with government, SIHRN and other civil society stakeholders throughout the country.

In 2002 CHA embarked on a comprehensive and consultative strategic planning process to plan a new vision and mandate for the next three years. The strategic plans take into consideration the unfolding political process in the country and creates a niche for itself in that context.

CHA's new vision – *“CHA believes in the respect of diversity and the promotion and achievement of fundamental rights and freedom which provides equal opportunities for development for all Sri Lankans”*, provides an opportunity to position ourselves in the new environment. This vision explicitly recognises plurality and one's right to be different whilst enjoying equal rights and freedom including the right of development for all Sri Lankans. Thereby CHA aligns itself towards a policy of tolerance in which human rights is enjoyed by all and would associate itself with programmes, policies and institutions who share similar aspirations.

As such the CHA will encourage an organisational culture that is not biased towards a particular ethnic, religious or political identity in its internal policies and its programming with a national focus

Under this new vision, CHA in January 2003, initiated discussions on peace in Sri Lanka, the peace process and its impact on the CHA Secretariat and the CHA membership, with the intention of achieving a better understanding of what peace-building means and to draft a set of reference guidelines for programming. The guidelines will articulate the commitment of the CHA Secretariat and the membership, to peace and provide a common direction to the CHA network to contribute towards achieving and sustaining peace.

Policy Guidelines on post-conflict programming, for CHA

The guidelines will help CHA to focus its planning of peace-related activities and its response to opportunities as well as permitting its members to reflect on their programmes and to refocus and reframe them if necessary.

CHA places high priority in the promotion of co-existence and the non-exacerbation of tensions. As such, as an **overall policy** CHA will ensure that all its membership has :

- an unbiased organisation culture and policies
- a national focus or is involved in interventions that have impacts nationally
- programming that are conflict sensitive and promote social harmony

Standards

Many principles and standards have been formulated internationally to guide the work of organisations involved in the delivering of humanitarian assistance. CHA supports policies and programmes which

- adhere to standards and principles that have been developed for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, development, protection of human rights, conflict-sensitive programming, mine action, peace-building such as the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, International Mine Action Standards, Sphere Minimum Standards and the Humanitarian Charter, and conflict-sensitive programming
- endeavour to maintain good practices drawn out in these standards

Communication

CHA will communicate with a wide range of stakeholders and actors for the purpose of advocacy and public relations. It will strive to influence policy makers and link the grassroots with high level decision makers and vice-versa to provide better standards of living and opportunities. In order to do this CHA will:

- actively pursue the opening of channels of dialogue between the GoSL, LTTE, civil society and security forces
- gather and report on information in order to prevent conflict and to safeguard human security
- build awareness on human rights and dignity and report on violations of human rights

- proactively advocate on issues and for the inclusion of civil society in the peace process
- act as an information repository and conduit for use by all
- promote awareness on the work of the humanitarian sector
- coordinate and network to avoid the duplication of allocation of resources

Participation

CHA views participation as the ability for civil society and the grassroots to be involved in the peace process, and its impact on their lives and livelihoods. In the next 3 years CHA should also endeavour to increase its network base.

- emphasise increased focus in developing networks in the districts and widening its membership to reflect participation from all parts of the country
- coordinate and network resources so as to ensure that the right resources are reaching the right people

Development

In this changing environment CHA recognises the need to make the transition from a relief-oriented focus to a development focus. To achieve long-term sustainable development and reform CHA will:

- incorporate into programmes activities that strategically target youth and children with a view to building understanding and capacities
- include opportunities for peace-building in all aspects of development and humanitarian work in sustainable human development initiatives.

Advocacy

- intervene as appropriate to bring about reconciliation between cultures, religions and ethnicities to ensure just and equitable solutions in rebuilding livelihoods
- collectively and proactively advocate on humanitarian, human rights and development issues

Training

In order to meet the challenges which these policies entail, the CHA Secretariat and its membership will

- provide training to its staff on conflict – sensitive programming, conflict-resolution, good practices and working models
- ensure sustainability of projects through capacity building and empowerment of stakeholders
- strengthen grassroot level interventions to consolidate peace

We recognise that guidelines in themselves do not necessarily imply compliance. However, if our interventions are to be based on the belief that we owe it to those in need to protect them and to allow for standards of livelihood and dignity which are enshrined in global human rights standards and conventions, it would not be difficult for us to assess ourselves in terms of monitoring and evaluating our successes and failures in focussing on peace.

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