

**On the spot report – Some incidents which cannot be forgotten**  
**by Lawrence Christy, Planning Director, TRO – updated on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.**

ICRC is evacuating wounded and sick to Trincomalee by ship. At the same time International Community in general and ICRC in particular should put pressure on Sri Lankan government to stop shelling civilian targets and killing and wounding hundreds of civilians daily and allow sufficient food, medicines and non food items to be brought from the South.

A doctor in the Mathalan hospital told me that they had to do a cesarean operation on a wounded pregnant woman. The baby was born dead with a shell shrapnel inside its stomach. In another case a baby was born with both legs severed by shell piece. Both mother and baby were dead.

A shell attacked a crowded road. It smashed the head of a woman, then went through the stomach of an old man finally knocked down two children killing all of them. To the surprise of all in the road it didn't explode. If it happened it would have taken many lives instantly as the road was jam-packed.

A shell fell on a shelter and destroyed a small family. Father escaped as he was bathing from the well nearby early in the morning. When he entered into the smashed shelter wife's distorted body was lying in a corner. His mother in law's chest was slit open and her vital organs were exposed. He was looking for his 2 year old only son. He could not find out. While going round inside the shelter drops of blood fell on his bare shoulder. He looked up. To his horror he saw his son's body hanging from the iron beam of the devastated shelter roof. Most of the body parts were in shreds. Only the head was full with the face striped by red lines by a stream of blood sprang from the scalp of his head and flowed through his hair. His eyes were wide open looking at his father. What his eyes told? No one knows. He may be asking, "Why is it to me? I didn't do any harm to anyone." He was so young and tender like a petal of a rose flower. His life has been cut short. Father got upset by severe mental shock.. He is now under the psychiatric treatment.

TRO tractor was coming along the road. A shell fell on a nearby settlement. Some 50 metre away hundreds of things erupted into the air and fell back. The tractor driver Mani – a TRO staff understood very well that the things blew up high included shelter pieces, household goods and parts of human bodies. He rushed to the spot though he knew very well the dangers of going into a shell fell area. No one was seen in the vicinity because as usual all the people have taken cover inside the bunkers with the anticipation that another shell might fall around the same area. When he reached the spot many men have emerged from the bunkers and have got engaged in evacuation of wounded and identifying the dead.

The place was in shamble. Things were strewn all around. Clothes, cooking utensils, machinery such as sewing machine and water pump and a cycle and a motor bike were in a messy state. They were blackened and smashed to pieces. The bunker inside the shelter was shattered and filled with sand and other destroyed items. The tractor driver could see from his tractor some dead bodies in that chaotic place. A shelter was totally destroyed by getting direct hit killing 7 people. Many inmates of neighbouring shelters were wounded severely.

A father was carrying his nine year old boy. The boy was lying on father's lap. Our staff looked behind and was watching the loading of wounded while being in his driver's seat. The boy's neck was slit open. From the cut vein blood was streaming out. The driver could discern that the boy was steadily collapsing. Within few seconds all his movements have stopped. He was dead before the tractor moved out. A woman was brought – there was a big hole on her right forehead. She was breathing heavily. Looking at shuddering of her body and the jerks in her breath the driver thought that she too was going to die soon. As he guessed correctly she has died on the way to hospital. Another man was inside the trailer – both his legs were smashed and were hanging on. A small girl was placed inside the trailer of the tractor with a slight tear of her stomach exposing a piece of intestine. At that time a TRO volunteer has come on a motor bike to assist. The small girl was put on the motor bike with a young girl accompanying her to be taken to the hospital. He rushed to the hospital so quickly – he has come back to transport another wounded before our trailer was loaded with all injured – altogether 12. The tractor trailer was in a bloody muddle. It moved quickly from the crying and howling relatives. The cry of the relatives and their lamentation could be heard even at a long distance. The driver narrating this incident told me that this would linger for ever in his life.

We were in our tent. A bullet rushed through our tent making a hole on it. There was a hue and cry from a shelter further down along the array of shelters. Mother was feeding rice to a 2 year old boy. He was seated on her mother's lap. That bullet went through the boy's heart and came out. Blood was streaming out from both front and back side. Mother's sari was soaked by his blood. He was taken immediately to the hospital. Father came back wailing with the dead body. On his way to hospital he has died. Death of innocence.

A woman was brought to the hospital. An RPG shell has gone through her both thighs and has stopped coming out. It was like an arrow trapped between the legs. The shell didn't explode. She was taken to the operation theatre. The surgery has to be done carefully. The shell may explode at any time. Disposal specialist on unexploded ordnances had to be brought. He removed the fuses and made the shell inactive. Then both legs - one from the thigh and the other from the knee were amputated. Her life was saved but she was condemned to live as a disable person without both legs throughout the rest of her life.

A young family was brought to the hospital. On lifting from canter vehicle father was found dead. His body parts from his abdomen had been severely damaged. Mother's one breast has been blown out – blood was flowing out. She was still alive. One and a half year old boy child was with minor injuries. He was sitting beside her mother. Before taking to Operation Theatre mother too has died. The child was crying with shrilling voice. He was toddling towards her mother. He stopped crying, hugged her mother strongly and started feeding from the breast intact. We don't know whether he got any milk from her dead mother but his mouth was full of blood streamed from the other slit breast.

A lone shell fell 30 metres away from our shelter at about 9.00 in the morning. No one expected. With big sound and flash a force shook our shelter – we all fell flat on the sandy ground. Taking cover in our bunker for few seconds we emerged from it and rushed to the spot where the shell

fell. Wounded were taken to hospital on motor bicycles. A man's intestines were out. A boy went with him on the motor cycle was seen pushing them inside. A woman's leg was dangling from her left thigh. A child was wounded all over her body. I peeped through the cadjan cover into a shelter which got the brunt of the shell attack. Four people lay dead. An old woman, a lady, her teenage daughter and a small girl. The lady's body was partly covered by sand.

TRO organized a tractor to be brought for the dead to be buried. The dead bodies were put into the tractor while a TRO staff was taking note from the husband of the young lady about the identification of the dead persons. Shell fragments have made deep holes on the bodies of the dead persons. The clothes were drenched by blood. The blood of them has flowed in the sand and has made wet and red spots here and there. The small child's head was not there. Her hand was clutching a piece of rotti which she was eating when the deadly shell fell. My colleague told a TRO volunteer to collect everything for burial. TRO volunteer was picking up what remained - small pieces of the child's head and was putting them into a bag.

With the participation of the head of the family who escaped as he went to beach to buy fish TRO carried out the burial of the four dead persons in a common burial ground.

### **Coordination of relief work**

**Coordination: Coordination meetings** are held in short intervals to expedite the relief activities. Important decisions are taken to ease the burden of the IDP population. This is attended by government representatives (de jure and de facto), TRO, local and international NGO and ICRC (local staff), cooperative representatives, Health and local government services and NGO consortiums. Some decisions taken in those meetings are given below:

1. Opening up gruel provision centres.
2. Construction of pit and water seal toilets.
3. Construction of wells for drinking and bathing purposes.
4. Home visits of volunteers from TRO and Health Services to identify problems and needs and conduct awareness creation programmes about hygiene habits.
5. Chlorination of wells.
6. Creation of market places to remove road side vendors.
7. Water supply.
8. Disposal of human waste.
9. Price control on essential food items.
10. Control on meat sellers.
11. Rounding and elimination of stray dogs.
12. Flies and mosquito control.
13. Pollution control and environment protection.
14. Strengthening of elders' Homes. (Men and women)
15. Strengthening of home for mentally retarded.
16. Volunteer support for hospitals.
17. Promotion of indigenous medicines.
18. Immediate transport of injured persons to hospitals.
19. Removal of dead bodies for burial or cremation.

20. Famine control and support for vulnerable people such as children, differently able, pregnant, lactating mothers and women headed families.