



**ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2009
STATEMENT PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE HUMANITARIAN
COMMITMENT AND COURAGE OF VOLUNTEER STAFF IN
NORTH SRI LANKA**

In September 2008 SOLIDAR Sri Lanka along with UN agencies and nine other NGOs still working in the LTTE controlled Wannai area were ordered by the Sri Lankan Government to cease operations and withdraw their staff south into government controlled areas. At that time an estimated 200,000 people had been displaced from their villages and land by civil conflict and were urgently in need of basic humanitarian support.

Following SOLIDAR's relocation outside the Wannai 29 SOLIDAR local staff remained in the Wannai as Humanitarian Aid Volunteers working under the Government Agents (GA) of the districts of Mullaitivu and Killinochchi until April 2009. Their coordinator and the SOLIDAR focal point was S.Kokila Vany; she initially withdrew south of the conflict lines but later agreed to return to improve liaison with the GAs and volunteers from other INGOs and the overall effectiveness of the humanitarian operation.

Prior to their withdrawal the NGOs had agreed with the Sri Lankan Government that they would leave emergency relief stock, stores and some fixed assets such as water bowsers to be used by the Government Agents to provide emergency relief. Using these materials, the volunteers supported the construction of hundreds of emergency shelters, the distribution of tarpaulins, the building of latrines, the distribution of water, and other essential items such as mosquito nets and cooking pots to the displaced internal refugees and helped to maintain hospital generators and essential electrical equipment.

As the conflict intensified the humanitarian volunteers were pushed along with the displaced population east and finally into the narrow coastal strip where the final battles were fought. They endured life under constant shelling - where thousands of civilians perished around them - in conditions of acute shortages of water, food and medicines as well as being exposed to monsoon rains and tropical heat with limited shelter. During this time they continued whenever possible to distribute what supplies of water and other essentials they could and to support their fellow Sri Lankans.

Through this Statement this General Assembly of SOLIDAR and its forty-seven member organisations pays tribute to the bravery and commitment of the SOLIDAR volunteers and expresses its gratitude to them for their contribution to saving lives and alleviating suffering. The General Assembly also recognises the courageous contribution of volunteers from other NGOs, the UN, ICRC, and district medical and other staff working with the Government Agents in the conflict zone.

SOLIDAR STAFF HUMANITARIAN VOLUNTEERS: 2009 WANNI, SRI LANKA.

SOLIDAR is a European network of 47 NGOs and labour movement organisations working towards all people living in dignity. Working in alliance with trade unions, SOLIDAR promotes equality, solidarity and social justice in the fields of social affairs, international cooperation and education in Europe and worldwide.

For more information visit www.solidar.org