

Congressman Danny K. Davis
Human Rights Caucus
Sri-Lanka: Challenges and Efforts to Effectively Deliver Humanitarian Relief in the
Wake of the Tsunami
2325 Rayburn House Office Building, 3:30-5:30pm
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The tiny island of Sri Lanka sits on the Indian Ocean surrounded by giant countries with dominating cultures that leave the island shadowed. Within this community, there is a group who feel even smaller in comparison, the Tamil peoples. On this island slightly larger than the state of West Virginia, there are two areas—one that represents the majority population of the region, the Sinhalese, and the other that represents the minority, the Tamils.

On December 26, 2005, a devastating Tsunami swept this nation with grief. In the nation which has a population of about 20 million, 30,000 were found dead and nearly half a million were displaced. The region with the greatest impact from the natural disaster was the northeast region, mostly occupied by people of Tamil ancestry. This region holds 2/3 of the casualties, 60% of reconstruction needs and ¾ of the orphaned children in the country.

The world was quick to respond. Companies, communities, families and individuals worldwide poured aid into this nation and the 13 other countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The aid given toward this disaster was unprecedented standing mid-June at about \$12.8 million dollars in worldwide contributions. Unfortunately, the distribution of aid has not been fairly distributed in areas most in need in a fair and equitable manner throughout the entire country.

Historically, Sri Lanka has undergone a civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is designated by the State Department of the United States government as a terrorist group fighting for an independent Tamil state. The origin of this conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are allegations of ethnic and language discrimination and the subjugation of peoples' rights. Sri Lanka has suffered over 20 years of war that has crippled the infrastructure and economy in the northeast and other areas. Humanitarian and reconstruction aid since the Tsunami has not reached all of the affected areas due to social unrest between the Sri Lankan government and the paramilitary LTTE. There has been minor progress toward comity among the opposing groups in Sri Lanka.

I recommend that equitable humanitarian and reconstruction aid be provided for Tsunami and war affected areas. Also, I call upon the State Department to review its policy toward the LTTE and intensify negotiations for Tsunami humanitarian relief. It appears to me that there must be open communication between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, which has mixed definitions relative to whether it is or is not a terrorist organization. Finding solutions is never an easy task but I believe that when freedom loving people interact there is bound to be some discernable change.