Death Rates among Internally Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka

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The attention of the Ministry of Healthcare & Nutrition has been drawn to reports circulating in the International media regarding the death rate among the internally displaced persons currently residing in welfare villages in the Vanni.
The Ministry is reliably informed that certain persons and agencies have reported deaths as high as 1400 per week in the IDP villages, a figure which is totally inaccurate and arbitrary and is rejected outright by the Ministry of Healthcare & Nutrition. It is pertinent to note that a transparent and efficient mechanism by which the total number of deaths is reported daily to the Ministry; using information supplied by the Ministry officials in place at the IDP welfare villages, the Police and the Hospital authorities, is in place in the IDP villages. After careful review of these daily reports i the total number of deaths for the past one month was 163 with a reported average of 5.62 deaths per day while the highest recorded number of deaths for a single day was 11, on the 07th of July which happened only once. Therefore the figure of 1400 is a gross exaggeration.As per the international standards specified in the "Sphere guidelines", a daily number of 6.6-13.2 deaths are accepted as normal for an IDP population of 265,000.Therefore the deaths occurring at IDP villages should be compared with this "Gold Standard" to declare whether deaths occurring in IDP welfare villages are acceptable or not. It should be noted that the actual number of average ' deaths per day is 5.6 as per the list annexed and this is well below the standard to raise concern.The WHO in a very recent report has commended and stated that the health status of the IDPs has improved drastically over the last several weeks bringing it to national levels. It must also be taken into account that the population composition of the IDP villages has a high percentage of elderly and that these people had been denied the most basic amenities such as nutrition and medical care while being held hostage by the LTTE terrorists before being liberated by the Security Forces, therefore they are more vulnerable to illnesses, a fact that the Government of Sri Lanka is aware of and has addressed by swiftly implementing an efficient & easily accessible healthcare infrastructure in the IDP villages .It is clear that certain figures being circulated among the International Media are inaccurate and baseless and do not reflect the ground reality. It appears that these reports are being circulated by malicious elements for the sole purpose of undermining the good work done by the Government of Sri Lanka in taking care of the Internally Displaced Persons.Thus the Ministry of Healthcare & Nutrition calls on all agencies and individuals to refrain from publishing inaccurate and unsubstantiated data which distorts the painstaking efforts the GOSL has made towards improving the welfare of the IDPs.Dr H.A.P. Kahandaliyanage Secretary/Ministry of Healthcare & Nutrition