

Dear

SUBJECT: Relief camps in Chirang District & New Bongaigaon

On behalf of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, (NCPCR) and its team, I wish to thank the Assam Government Administration for all the arrangements made during our visit to the State from 05th to 06th September and 09th to 10th September 2008. We would particularly like to thank Shri Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister for meeting us and sharing our concerns for priority attention by the State Government on the appalling and deteriorating conditions facing children in the State relief camps. We also express our disappointment at not being able to meet you and the Secretaries of the relevant Departments to share the Commission's concerns and request for priority action on the critical issues. We would also like to thank Mr. Burman, Additional Chief Secretary for chairing this meeting, which included representatives of the concerned Departments and the BTC.

During our visit in the region, we visited four camps in Chirang District and one camp in New Bongaigaon. These included, the Santhal dominated Runakata, Bengtol, Shantipur and Devsri relief camps in Chirang District and the Bengali Muslim dominated Chalabila camp in New Bongaigoan District. The team interacted with the residents of the camps and conducted public hearings in the Devsri and the Chalabila camps respectively. We were appalled and horrified, to say the least, by the living conditions in these camps. The individual testimonies of the camp inmates during the public hearing, spoke of the enormous tragedies and suffering of one and all and most importantly, children.

We strongly feel that the State has an obligation to address the emergency situation regarding the dangerously deteriorating health, water and sanitation situation in the camps and to ensure their fundamental human rights as paramount concerns including access by the children and their families to all their entitlements as citizens of India. We present the following issues for immediate, priority action by the State Government and the Bodoland Tribal Council (BTC). These issues have already been raised during the meeting that was held with the representative officials from the relevant Departments of the State Government on 10th September 2008.

- I. **Health & Nutrition.** There is a deplorable state of child health in the camps. The absence of ICDS, SNP and Anganwaris has deprived the children of their nutritional health. Immunization is a critical issue. With the exception of Pulse Polio, no other vaccinations have been administered to the camp children. A random

sampling in respect of immunization was done during the Public hearing at Devsri camp. Out of the 225 children present, not a single child had been administered with the complete immunization dose. In addition, the camp inmates have to travel great distances to access the dispensary at Shantipur which has invariably led them to opt for quacks.

Recommendation: The Commission recommends instituting urgent measures to administer complete immunization for all eligible children. It also recommends an action plan to be developed by the State to monitor the health and nutritional status of children living in the camps, pregnant mothers, the strict implementation of ICDS, SNP, employment and training of Aganwari and ASHA workers, and applicable government schemes for children.

II. Education. There is only one EGS and one ME school in Devsri with grossly disproportionate teacher to student ratio. While the EGS school has a ratio of 2 teachers to 198 students, the ME school is a venture where the teachers have not been paid their salaries since 1994. Despite high aspirations for education in the camps, there are many children not going to school. There is no provision of Mid Day Meals under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. Similarly, the Chalabila Camp in New Bongaigaon, has only one school to cater for a strength of 572 (0 to 6 years) and 1067 (6 to 14 years) with two teachers. Since the local schools are crowded, there is no access to education for these children and there are no provisions of mid day meals.

Recommendation: The Commission recommends the provision of additional EGS Schools with proportionate number of teachers as per the student ratio and the immediate provision of Mid Day Meals in all camps. The Commission also recommends the opening of Residential and Non-residential Bridge Schools in order to mainstream the drop out children and accelerate the education process. The proposal of an interim arrangement by the District Administration, Chirang to increase the strength of teachers by augmenting the skilled literacy workers employed in the Post Office is agreed to only as a temporary measure.

III. Water & Sanitation. There are no proper arrangements for safe drinking water. The camp inmates of Ipowi and Doesri camps are dependent on 'Iee' river and other perennial water sources for their sustenance. This is also the reason as to why there are numerous cases of water borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery etc. With no planned sanitation facilities the water sources for drinking and sanitation are co-located threatening the outbreak of an epidemic. Similar inhuman conditions are there in the Chalabila camp.

Recommendation: The Commission recommends that immediate measures be undertaken to provide clean drinking water and hygienic sanitation facilities in the camps.

IV. Relief Rations/Food Security Ration dependence is the primary means of sustenance for the people in these camps. With high labour capital in these camps finding work is erratic. On an average a person is able to get work twice to

thrice a week. In addition there are many whose names are not listed in the ration cards while those who accepted Release money grant of Rs. 10,000/- have also been struck out of the ration card lists.

Recommendation: The Commission recommends the disparity between the official list against the actual be cleared at priority in all camps. Rations supply must be streamlined. Specifically we draw your attention to the following cases of non-provision and request that you investigate and rectify these situations at the earliest:

- (i) non-provision of rations to 43 families since 1998 in the Bengali Muslim camp in Bengtol.
- (ii) non provision of rations to 700 households out of 1350 households in the Bengali Muslim Hapachara camp.

V. **Monitoring and Data Collection**

Recommendation: The Commission recommends the following data survey and monitoring thereof of all the camps be carried out:-

- Nutritional health of children including their height, weight and nutritional status.
- Maternal health and nutrition monitoring
- Age/sex profile of the children with the immunization schedule.
- Current provision (capacity, enrolment, attendance, teachers and curriculum) and requirement of EGS, Residential and Non-residential Bridge schools, and Teachers.
- Plan of action for monitoring and coordinating inter-sectoral agencies such as health, education, social welfare, the relief department and the district administration.

VI. **NREGA.** The NREGA is not in place in these camps. While some of the inmates have been given job cards as far back as two years ago, there has been no employment for them. For example, in the Chalabila camp, only 329 have been issued with job cards but none of them have been given jobs under the NREGA scheme. Similar is the plight of the camps in Chirang district. The absence of this scheme and other collateral vulnerabilities have forced many to get trafficked to work as sex workers and child labour in Bhutan and other parts of the country.

Recommendation: The Commission recommends job cards be issued to all eligible individuals living in the camps and the district administration should monitor the implementation of this scheme. As agreed by the District administration in Chirang District, employment options within the forest land in terms of forestation and work in nurseries can be undertaken.

VI. **Nodal Oversight & Grievance Redressal Mechanism**

Recommendation: The Commission strongly recommends local Grievance Redressal Mechanism by nominating a nodal officer from the

district administration along with an NGO representative. This would help addressing issues at the local level.

In addition to the above priority actions in the immediate term we request you to provide information regarding the children in respect of Para IV above in accordance to the list of questions that is enclosed in Annexure 1 hereof. On the basis of this, further targeted action plans need to be developed and implemented to address access and quality of key service provision in the areas of health and education and ensure protection and rehabilitation with regard to the impact of conflict & displacement on families.

We will visit the camps in both the districts after **three (3) months** to review the progress made on all the above points of action. We hope to receive a comprehensive response from you within 30 days time from the date of receipt of this letter. A detailed report of the Commission's visit shall be sent to you shortly.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Shantha Sinha)

Shri P.C. Sarma,
Chief Secretary,
Government of Assam,
Secretariat,
Guwahati.

Encl. List of questions (Annex).

Cc:

Shri Tarun Gogoi, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Assam, Secretariat, Guwahati.

Secretaries of all concerned Departments of Government of Assam viz.

- Social Welfare / ICDS
- Education / Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- Food
- Health
- Home
- Water & Nutrition
- Labour
- Rural Development
- Panchayati Raj

Principal Secretary, Bodoland Tribal Council (BTC)

(Shantha Sinha)
Chairperson, NCPCR

ANNEXURE 1

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

The Assam Government is requested to make the following information available:

[If applicable:]

POPULATION

LIVELIHOODS

HEALTH

EDUCATION