

Dear

**Subject: NCPCR's Visit to Relief camps in Tripura**

On behalf of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and its team, I wish to thank the Tripura Government Administration for all the arrangements made during our visit to the State from 07<sup>th</sup> to 09<sup>th</sup> September 2008. We would like to thank you and the Secretaries of the relevant Departments for meeting with us to share our concerns for priority attention by the Government on the appalling and deteriorating conditions facing children in the State relief camps. We would also like to thank H.E. Sri. Dinesh Nandan Sahaya, Governor of Tripura for sharing our concerns for priority attention by the Government

The Commission's visit followed a complaint received by it from the Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN) relating to the non inclusion of 7,024 Bru Children (between ages 0 to 8 years) in the ration cards and the denial of basic services to the children of the camps and their families, in particular the critical lack of health and education facilities. These camps include Naisingpur, Ashapara, Khashithai, Kainskua, Hamsaparu and Khachang.

During our visit, we visited the Ashapur and the Naisingpur relief camp. We also held a public hearing at the Naisingpur camp. We were appalled by the living conditions in the camps highlighted in the individual testimonies of the camp population during the public hearing where they spoke of the enormous tragedies and suffering on a daily basis, of one and all, their community, and especially their children. After the public hearing and the visit to the camps, the Commission also held discussions with the District Administration. In particular, the team found the health condition was below the sub critical level and presented a 'health emergency' for the State. There were 39 recorded child deaths in the month of August 2008 itself and 14 maternal deaths since January 2007. Other critical issues included access to health and education for children.

3. 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. 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 9<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

**I. Health & Nutrition.** There is a deplorable state of child and maternal health in the camps. In Kaskau camp, there have been 13 recorded deaths of children in August of this year alone primarily due to blood dysentery, malaria and fever. Majority of children are suffering from malaria, dysentery and diarrhea. As per the testimony of an SNP worker more than 40% of the children's nutritional status is Grade IV. While there are 45 SNP workers in the camp, no nutritional supplement is being made available and neither there is a centre for SNP training or supervision. With the exception of Pulse Polio, no other vaccinations have been administered to the majority of the children in the camps. The absence of ICDS, and the lack of supervision, coordination and infrastructure support across the SNP, health volunteers, ASHA workers and Anganwaris has deprived the children and mothers of their nutritional health. Due to the shockingly poor access to health services, many parents have reconciled to keeping their acutely ill children without treatment.

**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 workers, and applicable government schemes for children. It also recommends the setting up of a PHC sub centre at the Naisingpur and Aspara camp and a provision of dedicated doctors for the camp. It also recommends that the State identify the acutely ill children and ensure access to health facilities. As agreed by the District administration, training of health volunteers under the Tripura Health Volunteers Association must commence immediately.

**URGENT RECOMMENDATION: Urgent Investigation of Child and Maternal Deaths:**

We request the government to initiate an immediate investigation into the following reported child deaths. The documents received by the Commission from the 'Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum' attesting to these deaths are attached to this letter.

- (i) 13 child deaths during August 2008 in Kaskau camp
- (ii) 18 child deaths in 2008 in Ashaparra camp
- (iii) 11 maternity deaths in 2008 in Ashaparra camp

**II. Education.** There are six private schools and one EGS and 75 AIE centres commissioned under the SSA in 2007. No mid day meals are being served in the schools and neither there are adequate teachers. The EGS school under the SSA has issued only two notebooks per child during the year. There is no school shelter and therefore the classes are held only for one hour. Due to poor access to education, a girl of 16 years of age is studying in class III. 1500 children are studying in the six private schools with 24 voluntary teachers from the community. The only Government aid to these private schools was provided in 2003 when the schools were given blackboards. Children pay a tuition fee of Rs.50/- per month. There is

only one Higher Secondary School which too is run by the Naisingpur camp. Some schools are teaching under the Mizo syllabus while some are following the Tripura board syllabus.

**Recommendation:** The Commission recommends the provision of infrastructure for the existing schools, full-time learning, provision of mid-day meals and commissioning of additional EGS Schools with proportionate number of teachers as per the student ratio. The Commission also recommends multiple interventions to provide remedial education through Residential and Non-residential Bridge Schools. This would be aimed at mainstreaming drop out children and accelerate the education process for the significant number of children not studying in age appropriate class levels and unable to achieve normal grade progression. The Commission also recommends streamlining the syllabus to be taught to these children. The under mentioned points as agreed to by the Chief Secretary in the meeting should be immediately implemented:-

- Immediate distribution of mid day meals in the schools.
- Training of 73 education volunteers.
- Plan of action for provisioning of accommodation for schools.

**III. Water & Sanitation.** Twenty two out of the twenty four hand pumps in the Naisingpur camps are reported to be non functional. The other two hand pumps have very high iron content in the water. The camp population has to cover a distance with a turnaround time of more than two hours to fetch water from a stream. Invariably the women make three rounds to sustain the family. None of the sources are safe for drinking. 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 some of the water sources for drinking and sanitation are co-located threatening the outbreak of an epidemic. Similar inhuman conditions exist in the other camps. With no planned defecation points the population has continued to use the same space for the past ten years without means of disposal.

**Recommendation:** The Commission recommends that immediate measures be undertaken to provide clean drinking water and the creation of hygienic sanitation facilities in the camps. As agreed by the Administration, all the hand pumps/tube wells should be functional within seven days from the date of the visit. The under mentioned points as agreed to by the Chief Secretary should be immediately implemented:-

- Issue of filters for removing iron content in the water.
- Organizing health camps.
- Evaluate the health and nutritional status of all the children in the camps.

**IV. Power Connectivity.** We were advised during our meeting with district officials about the state-wide plan for expansion of power connectivity, with a priority focus on tribal areas. The district officials have agreed to provide a proposal,

which would address the inclusion of these camps as part of the State roll-out initiative.

**Recommendation:** We request that the State Government provide us with implementation feedback with regard to the above.

V. **Orphaned & Vulnerable Children.** During the public hearing and visits to the camps the Commission also heard about and met with caregivers for orphaned children as a result of maternal deaths etc.

**Recommendation:** Appropriate care and protection for orphaned children must be ensured and additional support for caregivers must be addressed. Also strong district and village level co-ordination (monitoring, vigilance etc) with the camps needs to be in place with regard to the prevention of child trafficking.

VI. **Relief Rations/Food Security** Ration dependence is the primary means of sustenance for the people in these camps. The team noted that there was no issuance of birth certificates for the children born in the camps. While this practice not only violated their fundamental right to citizenship it has also impacted their health and nutritional status. Their names have not been listed in the ration cards and the families are facing critical food shortage.

**Recommendation:** The Commission recommends that the names of such children be immediately listed in the ration cards and birth certificates be issued immediately. The disparity between the official list against the actual be cleared at priority. Rations supply must be streamlined. The recommendation is also in agreement with the Chief Secretary's commitment that if a child is physically present he is entitled to all benefits.

VII. **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.
- Age profile of the children with the immunization schedule.
- Current provision and requirement of EGS, Residential and Non-residential Bridge schools, and Teachers.
- Plan of action for inter-sectoral monitoring across health, education, social welfare and relief department and the district administration.
- The present status of all acutely ill children in the relief camps.

VIII. **NREGA** The NREGA is not in place in these camps. Job cards have not been issued to the camp population.

**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.

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

**Recommendation: The Commission strongly recommends a local Grievance Redressal Mechanism by nominating a nodal officer from the district administration along with an NGO representative. This would help in addressing issues at the local level. This point was also agreed to by the Chief Secretary.**

In addition to the above priority actions in the immediate term we request you to provide information regarding the children in respect of Para V above. 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 these camps 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 from the date of receipt of this letter. A detailed report of the Commission's visit shall be sent to you shortly.

With

Yours sincerely,

**(Shantha Sinha)**

Shri Shashi Prakash  
Chief Secretary,  
Government of Tripura  
Secretariat  
Agarthala

Encl. As Above

Cc:

**H.E. Shri Dinesh Nandan Sahaya**, Governor of Tripura Secretariat Agarthala

Secretaries of all Concerned Departments of Government of Tripura

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

**(Shantha Sinha)**  
**Chairperson, NCPCR**

**ANNEXURE 1**

**National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)**

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

[If applicable:]

POPULATION

LIVELIHOODS

HEALTH

EDUCATION