



# ADRC Highlights

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➤ **Sri Lanka floods: Observations by Terje Skavdal, RDRA in Asia, Head of OCHA, Kobe**

From May 21-31, 2003, Mr. Terje Skavdal, Regional Disaster Response Advisor in Asia for UN/OCHA, participated in an UNDAC mission to Sri Lanka. He has given us his observations:

□ **Sri Lanka Starts Immediate Rehabilitation as Flooding Subsides**

Torrential rains accompanied by heavy winds and landslides in central and coastal Sri Lanka on May 17-18, 2003 have left an estimated of 252 dead and affected over 157,261 families and approximately 600,000 people. Thousand of houses have been damaged, and a large number of them totally destroyed. Many buildings have been submerged, particularly in the Matara and Ratnapura district. This is the heaviest rain to hit Sri Lanka since 1947. Floodwaters have destroyed power and telephone lines, and sections of roads as well as bridges. This seriously hampered rescue and relief efforts.



The population in the affected districts was alerted to some extent before the arrival of the rain and this early warning helped lessen the tragedy. In order to deal with these almost biennial floods, a flood protection scheme has been in place for a number of years. The system was not designed to take a flood of the magnitude experienced this year and needs to be reassessed. The floodwater is no longer threatening, but water-borne and vector-borne diseases typically follow floods if clean water and proper sanitation is not present. Thousands of wells and latrines were flooded leaving the population without secure sources of drinking water. A few cases of diarrhea have been reported and the health authorities are closely monitoring the situation.

□ **Relief Efforts**

Within hours, a search and rescue operation was already underway. The Government had established an emergency operations room, mobilized the Armed Forces, and was delivering food and relief items. Armed Forces have played a vital role in the relief efforts, ensuring communications and transport of relief items to areas cut off by the flood. The District Secretaries in the affected districts started a rapid needs assessment. The Government response was matched by donations from commercial companies and the general public. In addition to national efforts, UN Agencies, donors, and the international humanitarian community responded promptly and emergency assistance was being delivered in accessible places within 48 hours. The main constraint during the first relief phase was to get access to the affected population. Many of the roads were flooded and both boats and helicopters had to be used to reach people stranded by the water.



The immediate relief phase is now phasing out as the water level has dropped, and the focus is changing to rehabilitation.

□ **Priority Needs and Requirements of Affected Districts**

The Government of Sri Lanka has accorded the highest priority to assisting those who have been internally displaced by the floods and have had their homes destroyed as a result of flooding. The Government has already responded to the immediate need for life saving efforts. The priorities for the Government now are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), health, rehabilitation of essential infrastructure, water, and sanitation. The Government of Sri Lanka will request international assistance to support the immediate rehabilitation efforts. For more information, please contact RDRA Mr. Terje Skavdal ([skavdal@un.org](mailto:skavdal@un.org)).

➤ **26 May, South-Sanriku Earthquake in Japan: Observations by ADRC**

From May 30-31, 2003, Dr. Tomohiko Hatori, Senior Researcher of ADRC, participated in an earthquake survey mission. He has provided us the following summary of his observations:

A large earthquake (M7.0) hit the northeast region of Japan at 18:24 on Monday evening, May 26, 2003 (JST). It is assumed that it was a slab failure type earthquake (not the normal plate boundary type). The Japan Meteorological Agency observed that the maximum acceleration was over 1100 gal (the highest record in JMA seismic observation history) while the maximum velocity was not so fast (less than 50cm/s) due to the short period of acceleration (about 0.2 – 0.3 sec). The damage was relatively small despite the large magnitude. Over 150 people were injured, but no human life was lost. There were a lot of landslides, liquefactions (especially Ohfunato port terminal), partially destroyed houses and buildings, and a few totally destroyed houses and buildings. Twenty-three bridge piers of the Tohoku Shinkansen (Japanese Super Express Railway) have been slightly damaged. Their concrete surfaces have come off or cracked but the reinforcing steel frameworks have withstood the earthquake. One of the major landslides (about 15 x 200 m) occurred along a gentle slope (about 10 degree maximum). A research group assumes that liquefaction on the sliding surface must have encouraged such a large amount of soil to slide. So far, this kind of gentle slope was not a target of landslide disaster management but the research group has pointed out the possibility of the same kind of landslide at the site of another gentle slope. Further investigation and countermeasures are needed. The municipal government estimates that the damage caused by this earthquake amounts to over 10 billion yen (120 million USD). For more information, please contact Dr. T. Hatori ([hatori@adrc.or.jp](mailto:hatori@adrc.or.jp)).



➤ **Earthquake Engineer Joins ADRC**

Dr. Tetsushi Kurita has joined ADRC on June 1, 2003. Seconded from Tokyo Electric Power Services Co., Ltd., Dr. Kurita, as a long awaited specialist, will greatly contribute to ADRC mainly in the field of Earthquake Engineering.

If you have comments or requests for this Newsletter, please write to ADRC at the address on the right.

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5th Floor, Hitomiraikan 1-5-2, Wakinohamakaigan-dori, Chuo-ku, KOBE,  
651-0073, JAPAN E-mail: [editor@adrc.or.jp](mailto:editor@adrc.or.jp) Phone: +81-78-262-5540