

# PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

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## ***UNDP helps tsunami-hit Sri Lankans get new IDs, passports***

**19 April, Sri Lanka** -- Photographers took instant pictures while officials in makeshift bureaus hurriedly wrote out new certificates at mobile documentation centres for tsunami survivors in Ampara.

Nearly 15,000 people queued up at schools and other locations in the Ampara district recently where public servants sifted through almost 50,000 requests for national identity cards, passports, birth and marriage certificates and other documents destroyed in the December disaster.

Some 31,187 people were killed and nearly a million left homeless after tsunamis hit Sri Lanka's shoreline on 26 December 2004.

Three months later, hundreds of thousands are unable to claim their property or get back their livelihoods because their personal documents were swept away.

The swift move to supply the missing documents came as survivors complained of difficulty in accessing bank accounts, redeeming pawned jewellery, applying to schools, travelling abroad and settling land disputes.

"For me, having an ID (national identity card) is necessary as I have to travel at night for my work," said Vedanayagi (eds: one name), a 40-year-old nurse at the Ampara hospital. "This is a great help to us as we can obtain the ID with minimum effort."

Under its Equal Access to Justice program, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) collaborated with the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and National Integration to field officials from 12 government ministries and departments at four centres in Kalmunai, Sainthamaruthu and Karativu to examine claims of lost documents.

"Receiving these vital documents without too much trouble is a fundamental right that tsunami survivors are entitled to in order to get their lives back on track," said Mr. Sanaka Samarasinha, the UNDP's Regional Rule of Law Advisor.

In Ampara, the worst affected of the 13 districts, some 58,616 families lost family members and property in the giant sea surges which smashed most of the coastline.

Among the officials present at the centres were personnel from the Police, the Examinations Department, Pensions Department, the Legal Aid Foundation and the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Replacing certificates would have been both a costly and tedious process.

"We would have had to first make an entry at the police station, then take a photo, then meet the divisional secretary," said Vedanayagi.

"Even then we would have to wait for months for the ID to come. Here we find all the services in one venue and it is very convenient for us."

Some of the applications were acceded to on the spot, particularly those for birth certificates, while in cases such as obtaining land deeds, the information was brought to Colombo for processing.

Said Weera Kasiththavu, 60, who attended the Samanthurai camp after hearing about it from vans with loudspeakers going past her home: "I came because everything is provided free. These services would have cost us a lot of money."

Free photographs for identity cards, passports and driving licenses were made available and penalty fees for lost passports were waived, with standard passport charges being the only fee levied.

The UNDP initiated the mobile clinic program in Hambantota in January where some 9,050 applicants had about 20,000 requests processed. Its successful follow-up in Ampara will see the service being extended to the Mullaitivu district shortly.