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No: 59

December 2025

When Waters Rise, Compassion Flows Deep: Sri Lanka's Story of Resilience

Sri Lanka is facing one of its worst natural disasters in decades. **Cyclone Ditwah** struck on November 28, bringing massive floods and deadly landslides that have left a trail of death and destruction across the entire island. **At least 465 people have died and nearly 366 are missing, with fears of the death toll crossing the 1,000 -mark.**

As rescue teams battle the vagaries of the weather day and night, the stories emerging from the disaster are heartbreaking. In a village near Gampola, **on November 27, a 13-foot wall of water crashed into a small community of around 100 families in the dead of night...** sending 66 people to their watery graves in the blink of an eye.

In Kandy, along the Ankumbura–Alawathugoda Road, a massive landslide buried around 50 houses in the Rambuk Ela area on the evening of November 29, with fears of around 50 people being buried in the mud.

In Kotmale's Rambodagala area, a landslide claimed 15 lives. All the victims were buried together in a mass grave – a deeply sad moment, showing how one strike could wipe out numerous lives, while in the Kurunegala district, 11 elderly residents drowned when floodwaters rushed into their care home in Makandura. Five Navy sailors are still missing as they were valiantly attempting to redirect the dangerous overflow from Chalai Lagoon in the northeast.



More than 180,000 people from over 51,000 families have lost their homes and are now living in 1094 temporary shelters set up by the

government. Over 15,000 houses have been completely destroyed, roads are blocked and communication systems have failed. Many

communities remain isolated or marooned from the outside world, unable to call for help or tell anyone they are alive.

A Nation's Hope Washed Away: The Long Road Ahead



This disaster comes at a devastating moment for Sri Lanka. **After years of severe economic, political, and social crisis, our country had just begun to lift its head with hope under a new government.** We were finally starting to rebuild, focusing on uplifting the poorest members of our society and creating pathways out of poverty. But just about two years into this recovery, at the year's end, this flood has washed away not only lives and homes but the hope of building a developed nation.

The destruction goes far beyond what we can see today. Our main airport was submerged under floodwaters. Critical roads and bridges that connect our communities and markets have been destroyed. Railway stations lie in ruins. Tourism sites that brought vital income to our economy have been devastated. Vast paddy fields ready for harvest are now underwater, and vegetable gardens that fed our families have collapsed into mud. Electricity power supply systems have been severely damaged, and water treatment facilities are not functioning. In the cruel irony of this disaster, people are surrounded by floodwater yet have no clean water to drink. They sit in darkness without electricity, unable to cook, charge phones to call for help, or even see danger approaching at night. The very foundations of our economy-agriculture, tourism, infrastructure - have been severely damaged.

Most heartbreaking is what this means for our people. Many have escaped with only the clothes they are wearing - everything else is gone. The cost of living, already high from our economic crisis, will surely rise even more. With farmlands destroyed and food supply chains broken, we face a looming hunger crisis. There will be no food in the coming months, and even worse, people will have no money to buy whatever little might be available. We must now rebuild broken roads, bridges, and entire towns from the bottom line of an economy that was already in crisis. Families who had worked so hard over the past years to become stable, who had just begun to stand on

their own feet again, have lost everything in a single night. They have been pushed back into poverty and desperate need. The poorest, whom we were trying so hard to help rise up, have been struck down once more. We have become poor to the poorest. It is truly a case of out of the frying

pan and into the fire. As a nation, we face not just the challenge of immediate rescue and relief, but the enormous task of rebuilding our entire economy and restoring hope to a people who have already endured so much. The road ahead is long and uncertain, but we must walk it together.

Rising Together: The Holy Family Sisters Stand With Their People



However, in the midst of death, destruction, pain, loss and intense fear, something beautiful is happening – the spirit of Sri Lanka's people refuses to break. Families who spent years building their homes and lives watched their life's achievements vanish in minutes. Yet, they are looking after their neighbours, sharing what little food they have and are there for each other. From other areas, less badly affected, meals are being cooked to be delivered by boat and vehicle to those still trapped by the floods.

Volunteers work side by side with Navy rescue teams, searching through dangerous waters where crocodiles lurk, for survivors and also to bring home the bodies of those who are no more. Most inspiring is to see Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims not only opening the doors of temples, churches and mosques but also their homes to shelter anyone who needs help. No racial or religious differences prevent a helping hand being extended, for we are 'one family'.

For us, as Holy Family Sisters, we are following in the footsteps of what our Good Father envisioned: ***"In devoting yourselves to the Works of the Association, you have not separated yourselves from those who live under the common law. As companions of their good angel, you follow them***



in the valley of tears, and to bring them back or to keep them for Jesus Christ, you share with them, as far you can, all the fatigues, the trials and the dangers of the journey."

We too have been deeply affected. Some of our convents are flood-hit. We too lost our communication systems and internet connections. We too felt the same fear and pain like every other Sri Lankan. Many of our Sisters have seen their own family homes damaged or destroyed by this cyclone – their parents, siblings and loved ones are among those who have lost everything.

Yet, even as they are assailed by personal grief and loss, our Sisters continue to serve. This shared suffering has not weakened us; it has deepened our commitment and strengthened our bond with the people we serve. Several of our convents have become shelters for families who have nowhere else to go. Our Sisters travel by boat through gushing flood waters and by vehicle over badly-damaged roads, taking hot meals to people, wherever we can reach them.

What touches our hearts most is how our work inspires others to join in. When people see us serving, they help too. Strangers show up at relief



centres with donations of money and food. Others roll up their sleeves to cook with us, pack supplies or simply hold crying children who have lost everything.

This cyclone has taken much from our nation. But it has also shown us something powerful: **our greatest strength lies in our shared humanity and our willingness to care for one another.**

As Holy Family Sisters, we try our best to continue walking alongside our people through this crisis and through the long months of rebuilding ahead. We will remain present in both the suffering and the hope of our beloved Sri Lanka.



One of our sisters, who is a doctor, is working with the affected people in Chilaw.

**Colombo Province
Sri Lanka**