

**High Commission for the Democratic
Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**



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My Ref. HCL/Media/16

14 July 2009

Mr. James Harding
The Editor
The Times
1, Pennington Street
London E98 1TT

Dear Mr. Harding,

**The Times Editorial 'Doctors Orders' and articles by Rhys Blakely
on 10 July 2009**

I wish to draw your attention to the Times Editorial 'Doctors Orders', the article titled 'Thousands die in Tamil 'welfare village' and the analysis titled 'The states rewriting of history' by Rhys Blakely, South Asia Correspondent on 10 July 2009. This is a quite fascinating phenomenon that the same reporter is doing both reportage as well as the analysis! (I remember Ms. Catherine Philp has done the same!).

Despite my not receiving at least an acknowledgement to an earlier letter written to you on 10 June 2009, I was compelled to write to you once again given the way that you are seeing Sri Lanka and its internal affairs and the utter cynicism in your way of presenting Sri Lanka to the Times readership. Let me explain the fallacy and misinformation in your editorial and articles.

When reading the first line that '*there is something despicable about forcing doctors to lie...*' I thought that you were, for the first time, on the right track and trying to highlight the way the LTTE forced the doctors to lie about the situation. Then with the next line, it was clear to me that you were still mistaken, in the same old way. The doctors made it very clear that they were forced to lie by the LTTE and hence, made the Times claim that there were 20,000 civilian deaths due to government shelling, utter rubbish. I fully understand your outrage at this as it challenges the Times credibility to the hilt (not necessary to repeat that the Times estimated 20,000 deaths by analysing one photograph taken by Ms. Philp and other journalists on the same plane did not do so! Even UN Secretary General who was also in the aircraft did not subscribe to the allegations of Ms. Philp.).

However, you still repeat the same in your latest editorial that '*aerial photographs of beach graves ... suggested that the figure was more than 20,000*'. This, I believe, is the first time in the history, that one has identified who is buried underneath just by looking at a photograph taken, again not even closer to the ground, but from few hundred feet altitude in a helicopter!

You are stating that '*suffering is still being inflicted on 300,000 Tamils interned in detention camps in northern Sri Lanka*'. In a latter paragraph you say that '*Tamil civilians ... are suffering from hunger, disease, insanitary conditions, overcrowding and the enforced separation of families*'. Though I do not think that I have to enlighten you on the recent history that you had such an interest to follow intensely, I deem need to point out the very facts of history that you are conveniently ignoring.

First, the 'origin' of Sri Lankan Internally Displaced People (SLIDP's) has to be reminded, as you seem to have 'forgotten' it entirely. The 300,000 mainly Tamil SLIDP's are a direct result of LTTE terrorism. They did not become destitute and displaced on their own. They were chased away from their original places by the LTTE. They were compelled to obey the LTTE orders, as the consequences would have been dire if not. **Still they had to face all the imaginable difficulties including all those you have mentioned as ones that they are undergoing in the welfare centres.**

- They did not have proper shelter and were forced to be on the move whenever the Sri Lankan forces advanced towards the LTTE held territory – i.e. from the west coast of Sri Lanka to the east coast. They had become a human shield to protect the LTTE terrorists.
- They were **hungry** and children were under nourished and prone to diseases.
- They had scarce medical facilities for their **diseases**, as the LTTE did not allow them to leave for government medical facilities available few miles away. A chicken pox epidemic broke out during this period. Chicken pox, though present in Sri Lanka, has never occurred as an epidemic in the recent past in Sri Lanka. Now the outbreak among SLIDPs is well contained by the Healthcare authorities there.
- They were in unimaginable **insanitary conditions** throughout their ordeal of constant moving, without having clean water and lavatory facilities etc.
- **Overcrowding and enforced separation of families** were things that they had to cope with during this forced displacement by the LTTE. People were pushed together into small stretches of areas continuously in order to make them an effective human shield. Their sons, daughters and husbands were forcefully recruited as fighters and at the height of the LTTE's military defeat they have grabbed whoever they saw 'fit' to fight and given guns in their hand and sent to the front line.

It is strange though that the Times do conveniently ignore all these and turn a blind eye on the LTTE. There is hardly any reference to the LTTE or their activities in the Times during past few months. Instead, the allegation is that the IDP's are denied all these facilities at the welfare centres. The reality is that all these facilities are now available to them and the conditions, which were not ideal in the beginning, are getting better every day. ***(This has been acknowledged by the British government: Mr. Gareth Thomas, Minister of State for the Department of International Development (DFID) stated at the House of Commons on 14 July 2009 that "The humanitarian situation is now stabilising. Conditions in the IDP camps remain basic but continue to***

improve as the priority needs of shelter, food, water, medicine and immediate access to surgical treatment are gradually met" House of Commons Hansard Column 12WS, 14 July 2009).

The suffering that the IDP's underwent for a long time and aggravated to the maximum towards the last ditches of the LTTE's fight with the Sri Lankan military is alleviating and a new era is dawning on them. (I have attached to this letter, information on healthcare facilities provided in these welfare centres, if you would dare to look at.)

Your editorial says that the '*doctors were the only source of news about the slaughter caused by the military's indiscriminate shelling*'. Here you not only ignore mentioning the LTTE firing at and deploying suicide bombers on fleeing civilians during the period that you are referring to, but you seem not to understand some simple facts, unconsciously or is it conscious ignorance for an unknown reason?

- The doctors were involved in treating the patients and not reporting on the situation. They did not carry cameras, shoot films, and relay it to the world. Then who did this reporting by interviewing the doctors in regular intervals? It was not Sri Lankan media. It was the LTTE's propaganda arm who did that reporting.
- It is then clear, to anyone who knows the LTTE and its misinformation campaign that they wanted the world to believe that the civilians are dying due to government military activities and not due to the LTTE terrorism. It was the last resort that they had at that last phase of the war, to create a false picture and gain sympathy of the other countries and the Tamil expatriates abroad.
- These doctors (except one of them) were appointed by the government to the hospitals in those areas and the LTTE had no other person better than them to make their case look credible and believable.

I hope now you would be able to understand why the doctors became 'only' source of news. I can understand your outcry at a time when the Times claim of 20 000 figure becomes ridiculous and credibility of the Times reporting is tested!

It appears that you are also 'outrageous' about the government 'orders' to scale down the Red Cross (ICRC) operations.

Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe in an interview to the BBC said, "The challenges are now different. Manning entry and exit points and handling dead bodies, transport of patients, in the **post-conflict era** are no longer needed. Since there is no more fighting now, we have told them [*Red Cross*] and others that they should scale down their work. It is a decision we took after careful consideration,"

It is wrong for you to say that they have been asked to leave the 'camps'. They are fully operational in the North including the welfare centres and they are closing down some of its operations in the East in Trincomalee and Amparai only. Your attempt to distort the reality is pathetic!

The Times goes an extra mile, away from any imaginable ethical standards to call '*the outside world to step in*'... '*if the Red Cross is forced to withdraw*' from Sri Lanka. I hope you would understand that it is the government of Sri Lanka that has the sole authority to decide whether any foreign organization should be allowed to enter and carry out their functions inside its territory. It is same with the Red Cross and it is governed by an understanding reached between the government and the Red Cross when they first entered the country. Any matter related to Red Cross activities will be governed by that understanding.

Your latest sensational figure is 1400. Your editorial and Mr. Blakely's article posted from India are accusing that 1400 are dying every week in the camps. It is hard for me to find words to explain how insane one could be at least to accept this figure. One comparison you could make would be with your own figures. Your famous figure of 20,000 civilian deaths attributed to unknown UN documents was calculated based on 1000 deaths a day into 20 days of fighting. The only reason for one to believe that figure was that there was tense fighting during those days. Now it is over and we are in the post-conflict period. According to your latest figure, there are 200 deaths a day (200 funerals) at this post-conflict period. It is amazing to see the extent the Times has gone to distort reality, blatantly lie and ridicule the intellectual capacity of its readership. I do not want to comment further on that. What I am interested to know is the '*Senior International Aide Figures*' that you are referring to as the source of this information. (This is contrary to your claim that independent agencies have no access to camps. If the so-called agencies have no access how could they obtain these figures?) Could you name at least one of them or one such aide organization so that one can cross check – not for the veracity of the ridiculous figure – but for the veracity of your source?

I do not wish to comment on your crying out to the Commonwealth, UN and cricketing organizations to boycott Colombo either. It has become clear to all that you are desperately trying to take charge of the LTTE propaganda baton and run the next lap of misinformation for the LTTE. The truth is far from your facts, figures and 'analysis'. Hence, the Times has become an untrustworthy source of information. It may be for the sake of Times credibility that you now reconsider your strategy of slandering misinformation against Sri Lanka.

I sincerely hope that you would be able to see my points in an objective manner and understand that there was no balance in the Times reporting on Sri Lanka during the recent months and in its latest coverage on 10 July as well. I also hope that you would have sincerity at least to acknowledge this letter and to publish the attached response with due prominence in your paper, in honour of dissenting opinion that you so blatantly stand for and to safeguard the right of the Times readership to know the 'other side of the story'.



Justice Nihal Jayasinghe
High Commissioner

Cc: 1. Mr. Richard Beeston, Foreign Editor, The Times
2. Mr. Rhys Blakely, South Asia Correspondent

Sir,

Your editorial 'Doctors Orders', the article titled 'Thousands die in Tamil 'welfare village' and the analysis titled 'The states rewriting of history' by Rhys Blakely, South Asia Correspondent on 10 July 2009 are full of false allegations and misinformation.

Contrary to accusation in your editorial that '*there is something despicable about forcing doctors to lie...*' by the government of Sri Lanka, it was the LTTE who forced the doctors to lie about the situation during the height of fighting. The doctors made it very clear at the press briefing that they were forced to lie by the LTTE and hence, made earlier claim by the Times that there were 20,000 civilian deaths (Catherine Philp article on 19 May 2009 titled 'the hidden massacre') due to government shelling, utter rubbish.

However, you still repeat the same in your latest editorial that '*aerial photographs of beach graves ... suggested that the figure was more than 20,000*'. This, I believe, is the first time in the history, that one has identified who is buried underneath just by looking at a photograph taken, again not even closer to the ground, but from few hundred feet altitude in a helicopter!

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- The doctors were involved in treating the patients and not reporting on the situation. They did not carry cameras, shoot films, and relay it to the world. Then who did this reporting by interviewing the doctors in regular intervals? It was not Sri Lankan media. It was the LTTE's propaganda arm who did that reporting.
- It is then clear, to anyone who knows the LTTE and its misinformation campaign that they wanted the world to believe that the civilians are dying due to government military activities and not due to the LTTE terrorism. It was the last resort that they had at that last phase of the war, to create a false picture and gain sympathy of the other countries and the Tamil expatriates abroad.
- These doctors (except one of them) were appointed by the government to the hospitals in those areas and the LTTE had no other person better than them to make their case look credible and believable.

You are stating that '*suffering is still being inflicted on 300,000 Tamils interned in detention camps in northern Sri Lanka*' and '*Tamil civilians ... are suffering from hunger, disease, insanitary conditions, overcrowding and the enforced separation of families*'. It is hard to believe that you have forgotten the recent history that you had such an interest to follow so intensely. It was when they were forced by the LTTE to move from Sri Lanka's West coast to the East coast over a period of

many months, providing the LTTE protection of a human shield, that they had to undergo all hardships that you have mentioned as ones that they are undergoing in the welfare centres.

- They were **hungry** and children were under nourished and prone to diseases.
- They had scarce medical facilities for their **diseases**, as the LTTE did not allow them to leave for government medical facilities available few miles away. A chicken pox epidemic broke out during this period. Chicken pox, though present in Sri Lanka, has never occurred as an epidemic in the recent past in Sri Lanka. Now the outbreak among SLIDPs is well contained by the healthcare authorities there.
- They were in unimaginable **insanitary conditions** throughout their ordeal of constant moving, without having clean water and lavatory facilities etc.
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The reality today is that all these facilities are now available to them and the conditions, which were not ideal in the beginning, are getting better every day. *(This has been acknowledged by the British government: Mr. Gareth Thomas, Minister of State for the Department of International Development (DFID) stated at the House of Commons on 14 July 2009 that "The humanitarian situation is now stabilising. Conditions in the IDP camps remain basic but continue to improve as the priority needs of shelter, food, water, medicine and immediate access to surgical treatment are gradually met" House of Commons Hansard Column 12WS, 14 July 2009)* The suffering that they underwent for a long time and aggravated to the maximum towards the last phase of the fighting is alleviating and a new era is dawning on them.

It appears that you are also 'outrageous' about the government 'orders' to scale down the Red Cross (ICRC) operations. It is wrong for you to say that they have been asked to leave the 'camps'. They are fully operational in the North including the welfare centres and they are closing down some of its operations in the East in Trincomalee and Amparai only. Your attempt to distort the reality is pathetic!

Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe in an interview to the BBC said, "The challenges are now different. Manning entry and exit points and handling dead bodies, transport of patients, in the **post-conflict era** are no longer needed. Since there is no more fighting now, we have told them [*Red Cross*] and others that they should scale down their work. It is a decision we took after careful consideration,"

The Times goes an extra mile, away from any imaginable ethical standards to call '*the outside world to step in*'... '*if the Red Cross is forced to withdraw*' from Sri Lanka. As in any country, in Sri Lanka it is the government that has the sole authority to decide whether any foreign organization should be allowed to enter and carry out their functions inside its territory. Sri Lanka - Red Cross affairs are governed by an understanding reached between the government and the Red Cross when the latter first entered the country. Any matter related to Red Cross activities will be governed by that understanding.

It is hard for me to find words to explain how insane one could be to accept that '*...about 1,400 people a week are dying at one of the big internment camps*' as claimed in your editorial as it ridicules the readers' intellectual capacity. One comparison you could make would be with your own figures. Your famous figure of 20,000 civilian deaths attributed to unknown UN documents was calculated based on 1000 deaths a day into 20 days of fighting. The only reason for one to believe that figure was that there was tense fighting during those days. Now it is over and we are in the post-conflict period. According to your latest figure, there are 200 deaths a day at this post-conflict period! Could you name at least one of the '*Senior International Aide Figures*' that you are referring to as the source of this information or one such aide organization so that one can cross check – not for the veracity of the ridiculous figure – but just for the veracity of your source? (This again contradicts your claim that independent agencies have no access to welfare centres. If the so-called agencies had no access, how could they obtain these figures?)

I do not wish to comment on your crying out to the Commonwealth, UN and cricketing organizations to boycott Colombo either. It has become clear to all that you are desperately trying to take charge of the LTTE propaganda baton and run the next lap of misinformation for the LTTE. The truth is far from your facts, figures and 'analysis'. Hence, the Times has become an untrustworthy source of information. It may be for the sake of Times credibility that you now reconsider your strategy of slandering misinformation against Sri Lanka.

Justice Nihal Jayasinghe
High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in London

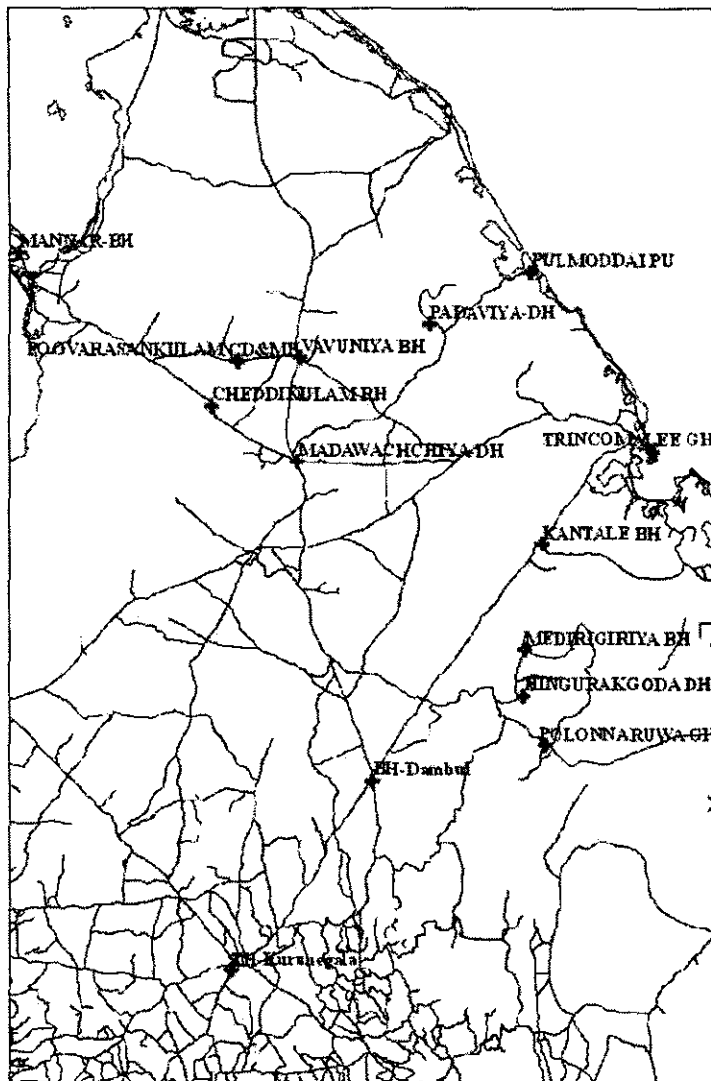
Situation Report on medical facilities provided in the Welfare centers Vavuniya

Ministry of Health (MoH) has mobilized its resources to a maximum to provide medical facilities to the civilians in welfare centers in Vavuniya. Additional 232 Medical officers have been permanently posted to the Northern Province and Padaviya hospitals. With this reinforcement, 304 medical officers (doctors) and the nurses to 986 are now working in hospitals and welfare centers in the North and Padaviya. Ministry of Health also organize a senior Registrar Anesthesia from Teaching Hospital Anuradhapura, a Paediatric Surgeon from Lady Ridgeway Colombo, 03 JMO from Kegalle, CSTDH from Karapitiya and a surgeon from Teaching Hospital Kalubowila to visit regularly to the camp sites.

- Increase in Medical officer capacity since 1st May 2009:

Padaviya (15), Mannar (15), IDP Camps (44), Chettikulum (10), General Hospital Vavuniya (25), Kabithigollawa (5), Madavacchiya (5), Kurunagala (10).

Map Showing the Major Hospitals involved with providing care to IDP patients



1. Medical Facilities- Hospitals

07 hospitals provide healthcare facilities for IDPs in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces;

1. General Hospital Trincomalee
2. General Hospital Vavuniya
3. General Hospital Mannar
4. Base Hospital Cheddikulum
5. District Hospital Cheddikulum
6. District Hospital Poovarasakulum
7. District Hospital Pampainimadu

In addition, 07 hospitals which are located outside the North & the East Provinces provide healthcare for the IDPs.

1. Base Hospital Dambulla
 2. General Hospital Polonnaruwa
 3. Base Hospital Hingurakgoda
 4. Base Hospital Kanthalai
 5. Base Hospital Medirigiriya
 6. Base Hospital Medavachchiya
 7. Teaching Hospital Kurunagala
- Medicine San Frontier (MSF), France constructed a 100 bed field hospital in Chettikulum to take care of the IDP population.
 - Indian government relocated its field hospital in Pulmudai to Zone 1 of the welfare center in Manik Farm area. Medical team comprising 8 doctors and 54 nursing, 115 beds, para -medical and technical staff are providing health care to IDPs.

2. Medical Facilities available

- Ministry of Health has assigned additional number of nurses to all hospital in the Northern Province. 114 nurses have been deployed to the Northern Province and 50 nurses to Trincomalee district and 18 to Padaviya.
- The number of beds available in the Cheddikulum Hospital has increased to 188.
- Base hospital in Poovarasakulum is identified for treating the patients infected with Chicken pox and other communicable diseases.

- Adequate stocks of all essential drugs have been deployed from all Regional Medical Supply Division to the hospitals in the North. The MOH also has appointed a senior Director from Medical Supply Division to Vavuniya to coordinate all the Drug supply to Northern district. A Senior Assistant Director is also located at the Chettikulam drug store, with a store keeper.
- MOH regularly provides 30-40 lorry loads of medical supplies to IDP camps. The recent consignment contained more than 500,000 oral doses for Chicken Pox and necessary antibiotics.
- A new drug store is to be established in Vavuniya to dispatch of required drugs.
- MOH has placed additional 37 Ambulances in hospitals in the North.
- 40 Ambulances (equipped with basic life support in each with EMT and driver) will be deployed to the PHC centers in each IDP camps with the assistance of Ministry of Local Government, Provincial Councils and Medical teams international.
- Additionally Ambulances were made available to;
 - One ambulance per zone 1 and 2
 - Two ambulance for zone 2

3. Preventive Healthcare:

- Drinking water quality analysis is carried out by health staff on a regular basis. The Public Health Inspector (PHI) also advocate for the frequent chlorination of the drinking water sources
- Routine immunization is being carried out in all welfare centers. *Unimix* is given to all children below 5 years.
- Vitamin 'A' mega doses were given to all IDPs expects pregnant women and elderly.
- De-worming (anti-helminthic) tablets/Pyrethin syrup (for children under 2 years) is given to all IDPs on arrival to camps.
- Family planning: condoms were made available to IDPs through the Public Health Inspectors (PHI) and Public Health Midwives (PHM).
- A mobile dental unit has been dispatched to provide dental care services for people living in welfare centres. A mobile laboratory was mobilized to Vavuniya region to improve investigation facilities in welfare centers.

4. Composition of Primary Health Care Centers (PHC) at IDP camp level:

- Every Primary Health Care Centre (PHC) covers 10,000-15,000 people, operates from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a 24 hour ambulance service. The Center has staffed with 3 Medical Officers with a nurse and a pharmacist/dispenser.

- The PHC will provide basic medical care, basic procedures (e.g. suturing, nebulization) and conduct clinics (Antenatal, postnatal, well baby, well woman clinics). It also carries out health education services & counseling services.

5. Mental Health and Psychological support:

- A specialist psychiatrist is station in Vavuniya psychiatric care for IDPs. Only Vavuniya and Jaffna has an acute care ward to treat mentally ill.
- Psychosocial interventions at IDP camp level is also need to be catalyzed and coordinated.
- Teachers trained in counseling have been mobilized by the education department to work at each IDP camp in Northern district.

6. Nutritional status in Camps

- Most of IDPs arrived from the former no fire zone have a poor nutritional health status.
- On arrival, all IDPs are given Triphosa (a micro-nutritional supplement) at the welfare camps.
- Vitamin 'A' mega doses were given to all IDPs expects pregnant women and elderly.
- Nutritional screening centers (where Therapeutic feeding will be made available) will be established at all primary health care centers in the 5 zones. The technical guidance will be provided by the Family Health Bureau and UNICEF, and the program will be implemented by Sarvodaya. The funding for this Emergency nutritional programme will be provided by UNICEF.
- Pompaimadu hospital has been identified to cater for highly vulnerable: elderly, pregnant mothers, post-partum mothers.
- The children under 5 years living in the camps were screened to identify the children with GAM (Globally Acute Malnourished). According to the available information five camps were screened upto now.

7. Nutritional Packages of Interventions

- A programme has been initiated to prevent of Malnutrition through Blanket Supplementary Feedings.
- Treatment of Moderate Malnutrition has been conducted by using UNIMIX / High Energy Biscuits (HEB)
- Treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition is done with providing BP 100 / Plumpy Nut and for uncomplicated cases while F-75, F-100 & ResoMal for complicated cases.
- MMN tablets will be provided for the pregnant women and Sprinkles will be given for the children under 5 years.
- Mebendazole tablets and *Pyrantale Pamoate syrup* are given for all children under 5 years.

- Hygiene education and appropriate infant feeding practices are done through PHM & PHIs.

No of medical officers deployed in North:

Hospital	Number of Doctors	No of Nurses
BH Padaviya	27	60
GH Vavuniya	81+RHO 23	147
BH Cheddikulum	13	12
BH Poovarasakulum (Isolation facility)	4	2
Pampainmadu Hospital	13	1
DGH Mannar	50	67
BH Dambulla	46	140
BH Kantale	63	124
GH Polonnaruwa	133	311
GH Hingurakgoda	15	17
TH Kurunagala	302	986

Deployment of Healthcare Officers in the Vavuniya IDP facility

		Referral Centres	Primary Health Care Centres	Primary Health Care Centres-Proposed	Medical Officers	RMO	Nursing Sisters	Nurses	Phrmacist	Dispenser	PHM	PHI
Zone 0	21061	1	2	4	4	0	1	2	2	4	6	1
Zone 1	39671	1	2	0	12	0	2	12	2	2	15	3
Zone 2	80548	1	4	0	24	10	5	8	2	5	18	4
Zone 3	40648	1	3	1	6	0	1	10	2	3	11	2
Zone 4	35400	1	1	6	14	0	2	15	2	6	9	5
Total	217328	5	12	11	60	10	11	47	10	20	59	15

Mobile health camps are conducted for Zone 2 and 4

Night on call facilities are available for zone 1, 2 and 3

*Prepared by Public Communications based on approved information given by Ministry of Health
09 June 2009*