

## A YEAR AFTER TSUNAMI, VICTIMS STILL LACK HOMES

BY Paul Wiseman, USA TODAY

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**HONG KONG** — A year after the waves spread destruction and death across South Asia, hundreds of thousands of tsunami victims still live in moldy tents and ramshackle camps where women are particularly vulnerable to abuse.



A child who survived the 2005 Asian tsunami looks out from an opening in a tent shelter Sunday in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Dimas Ardian, Getty Images

On the first anniversary of the tsunami Monday, 80% of the 1.8 million people left homeless by the disaster were still without "satisfactory permanent accommodation," the anti-poverty group Oxfam International estimates.

A survey of 2,300 tsunami victims

released this month by the Fritz Institute, a San Francisco non-profit group, found that 100% of respondents in the hardest-hit parts of the Indonesian island Sumatra, 92% in India and 78% in Sri Lanka were still in tents or shelters.

Indonesia, where the tsunami killed as many as 160,000 and left more than 500,000 homeless, has built just 16,200 of the 80,000 to 110,000 houses needed, the Indonesian government says. At the current rate of 5,000 new houses a month, its target won't be reached for more than a year.

Sri Lanka has built just 5,000 of 78,000 planned houses. Tamil Nadu, the hardest-hit state in India, has completed just 1,000 of 31,700 planned houses, Oxfam says.

Two United Nations experts complained last week that most survivors remain in shelters and many are "mired in unacceptably rudimentary conditions."

Miloon Kothari, a U.N. expert on housing rights, and Walter Kalin, a U.N. advocate for internally displaced people, said that women are vulnerable "to physical and sexual abuse" in homeless camps where they have little privacy.

In many camps, men and women share latrines and bathing facilities, says Ritu Sharma, president of the

Women's Edge Coalition, a Washington, D.C.-based group that advocates on behalf of poor women around the globe.

"There's a huge sense of frustration," says Sharma, who visited camps in Sri Lanka last month. "The people don't understand why the place is flush with (donor) money but they are still living in tents."

Oxfam and other relief groups give these reasons for the delay:

- The job is enormous. India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka together need 308,000 new houses — the equivalent, Oxfam says, of rehousing the population of Philadelphia.
- Land has vanished. In Aceh, the tsunami submerged or destroyed 200,000 acres, including at least 15,000 plots of land.
- Governments have tried to restrict building near the water. Sri Lanka and Indonesia have dithered over establishing "buffer zones" close to the coast. The uncertainty has delayed construction.
- Property rights are unclear. The tsunami washed away deeds, titles and boundaries.
- Building materials are scarce and expensive. In Aceh, demand for housing and fishing boats has tripled wood prices.