

Most tsunami victims still homeless: U.S. survey

MIAMI (Reuters): Nearly a year after the Indian Ocean tsunami, almost all of the aid recipients in villages hit by the waves are still living in temporary shelters or camps, according to a survey released on Tuesday.

The nonprofit Fritz Institute, a San Francisco group that provides logistic expertise to relief organizations, surveyed a representative sample of 2,300 people in villages hit hard by the tsunami in India, Sri Lanka and the Northern Sumatra region of Indonesia.

In Indonesia, 100 percent of the respondents still lived in camps or temporary shelters run by the government or by aid groups, as did 92 percent in India and 78 percent in Sri Lanka, the survey found.

Some had moved from tents into makeshift shelters with thatched roofs or open sides, while others were staying with relatives but "almost nobody in our survey was in permanent shelter," said Dr. Anisya Thomas, the institute's managing director, who oversaw the survey.

Rebuilding was slowed by continued flooding in India and by building-code and land-allocation issues in all three nations, she said.

"These are densely populated countries, so there's not a lot of discretionary land to give away. A lot of people on the coast don't want to move deep inside," Thomas said.

"And not everybody that was affected by the tsunami was in permanent shelter before the tsunami. The tsunami affected a lot of poor people."

A magnitude 9.15 earthquake that hit on Dec. 26 last year triggered the catastrophic tsunami that left up to 232,000 people dead or missing and wiped out coastal communities in a dozen Indian Ocean nations. (**)