

Mamallapuram, January 17, 11 pm

What a day !!

Today we would first go to the bank to open an account in the name of the fishermen's community. We gathered at the telephone booth of Ganesan. Whilst I'm waiting I receive a call on my mobile from a certain Mr. Pattel from Dubai. An Indian man, who seems to know quite a lot of people in Chennai. Marc has told him about our project and he advises me to contact Dr. Govindarajan. This man would certainly be able to assist and advise me. I call Dr. G. and he explains immediately in short words that the government has issued some very severe rules concerning the help (and certainly foreign) at the fishermen's communities who have been struck by the tsunami and he advises me strongly to respect these rules. I tell him that we are coming to Chennai to buy nets and I ask him if I can pass buy with the leader of the community to get a clear sight of what is allowed and what not; what is possible and what not.

On the way we stop to buy the nets but they don't have the quantity we need, so we have to go to a wholesale shop. So we first go to see Dr. G. Here I get a cold douche: up to now the Indian government has refused every foreign help. Ignore these rules would discredit the community as well as myself. Every help is organised via a "collector" who dresses an inventory from whom needs what, where and how much. Afterwards it will be decided where they can establish themselves and what they will receive, but all the funds have to be put in one account !!! But this is not at all our objective. He calls for me a certain Mr. Raman who is the chief of a.o. the collector of this region. Mr. Raman explains clearly to me that it would be very unwise to go against these directions. But he is very understanding for our project and he would contact me again if he had any news. This man does not yet know me of course, and I ask Dr. G. the address of his office and we get off to see him. He is a little bit surprised, but he receives us very friendly. As it happened already several times before my visiting card opens doors. Seeing the Ganesh he is all ear. I tell him the whole story, how I have started to consider these people as my family, what we want to do for them after the tsunami and how many people have engaged themselves in Belgium, Netherland, Luxemburg, France and even Abu Dhabi. He takes the newspaper of today and shows me an article with the official rules concerning private initiatives inside and outside the country. Who knows me knows also that I don't believe in pure coincidence. That this reglementation is published just today, the first day I am here, who says that private persons or organisations can adopt a certain village provided that it concerns at least 50 families (and there are 50 families now, as some who had left have come back) and the investment should at least be 5.000.000 roepies (+/- 100.000 €). This guideline has clearly been made for our project. What matters now is that the fishermen's community is recognized by the collector and to ask the same collector to approve our project. Once this has been done the reconstruction can start. The 50 families are there, the money is coming, and the only thing that has to be done is obtaining the recognition of the collector. After some cross-talk Mr. Raman calls the director of the Ministry of fishing and to the collector to inform them that they must recognize the community (with name and place) as soon as possible and that they have to give this project priority in order to be able to deliver the permission to adopt them as soon as possible. He also asks us not to buy nets and to wait a little bit longer so

that we can do everything by the book. For this we can count on his full support. He will keep me posted up and hopes that I can return home with good news. We return to Mamallapuram without nets but with the good news that we will be able to realize our project with our fishermen. They have also realized that this is the only right way to obtain what we want: bring them a better future. Once arrived in the camp of tents a meeting is be held immediately. Finally they believe again in a future. So I decide to have dinner tomorrow afternoon with the whole village and to offer them a nice chicken Byriani. I will send you some pictures later on; cheers !

When I'm sitting in my room after this long day I realize why I first had to go to Abu Dhabi. Why the first shop did not have nets and we first had to go to Dr. G. Even why I postponed my departure from 12 to 14 January.

Now there is hope again, we have a plan to execute.

Anyway I will sleep better and tomorrow it is feast.

Good night every body and till tomorrow.

Namaste

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