

Sri Lanka: Survivors of Cyclone Ditwah in central plantation district demand permanent housing and condemn plantation management

Our reporters
4 December 2025

WSWS reporters visited the Siththi Vinayagar Temple Hall in Kandapola—9 km from Nuwara Eliya in Sri Lanka’s central plantation district—on December 3 to speak with survivors of Cyclone Ditwah, which has devastated much of the island. The temple has been converted into a temporary shelter for displaced residents.

Nuwara Eliya District, with a population of 724,957 and located in a hilly region, is among the worst hit by heavy rainfall, flooding, landslides and stone slides. As of Tuesday evening, 89 people were confirmed dead and 73 missing—the second highest death toll after Kandy District—according to the Disaster Management Centre (DMC). Cattle, crops and property has also been destroyed. Damaged infrastructure and impassable roads have severely hampered rescue operations. Most of the district’s population are Tamil-speaking tea plantation workers earning low wages.

The Siththi Vinayagar Temple Hall is currently sheltering nearly 300 families of plantation workers—about 800 people, including children. WSWS reporters spoke with several survivors from Concordia and Eskdale tea estates, both managed by Udapussellawa Plantations, a subsidiary of Browns PLC Ltd.

A worker explained, “On the morning of November 27, we rushed out of our homes as we saw a landslide occurring before our eyes.” He described how, in contrast to the indifference of officials, the local community had stepped up: “Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim people alike from Kandapola town and surrounding areas are supporting us, providing meals three times every day. They are providing medicine and other facilities if they can.”

He condemned the estate owners, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) government, and the plantation trade unions, including the Ceylon Workers’ Congress (CWC): “No one from the estate management, the government or the trade unions has provided any support. They just visit and make promises of aid, but nothing has been given.”

A female worker from the Eskdale estate began by describing their deplorable housing conditions: “We are living in the line rooms, which are like hell. It is hard to live there. There are several cracks on the walls.” She continued, “During rainy seasons it’s very difficult to live with children. Estate management doesn’t care about our housing, even if we complain to them.”

She urged the WSWS reporters to expose their conditions: “Please go and see how we are living in these houses, take videos and expose this to the world. We don’t want to return to our houses. First, we want new houses built in safe places. If not, we don’t want this kind of hellish life.” She also criticized the unions: “In our estate, most of the workers are members of the CWC. But its officials don’t care about the conditions we are facing.”

Sithirasena Sutha, a young worker from Concordia estate, said: “On the 27th, we left our houses, leaving our belongings and everything, and we had to walk under very severe conditions, nearly five kilometers to reach this place. All the roads were damaged by floods and filled with mud.” She added that the places where they live are not suitable for human habitation, and “the estate management and the government don’t care about us.”

Another female worker from Concordia described

exploitation by management: “We are working in the estate under very difficult conditions. The estate management wants us to pluck more tea leaves. Every time they weigh the leaves, they deduct three kilos from our total. Because of this, they deduct nine kilos when weighing three times. Our trade unions do not oppose this. Under these circumstances, with the high cost of living, it is very difficult to survive on our daily wage.”

The WSWs reporters noted that the temple shelter is being run by the Temple Committee with support from local residents and business owners.

Selvakumar explained that on November 27, three members of the same family—Nickolasraj, his wife, and his father—were killed by flash floods at Brookside St. John’s Estate in Kandapola. A landslide in the nearby Suriyagandi estate diverted floodwaters into a canal near their home.

Nickolasraj’s wife was swept away instantly. He rushed out holding their two-year-old child and was also carried off by the current. The child, found floating in the garden, was rescued. His father, pulled from the mud the next day with severe injuries, died soon after because no transport was available to reach the hospital. Another relative of theirs was also swept away by the water.

Nickolasraj and his wife’s bodies were found several kilometers away. Two houses were destroyed and several others partially damaged. A relative told the WSWs that the family had been asked to vacate the area and was staying with other relatives. However, due to lack of alternatives, they are being forced to return to the same location.

In Kandapola, most plantation workers rely on subsistence farming for extra income. Much of the agricultural land has now been destroyed, and restoring it for cultivation will be extremely difficult.

On December 4, WSWs reporters visited the Fairlawn Estate in Up-Cot, Maskeliya, in Nuwara Eliya District, where 40 families and 49 houses have been affected. Six homes were completely destroyed. Roads and land have cracked, and the threat of further landslides persists as rains continue.

To escape danger, 150 residents have taken shelter at a nearby school. Locals and nearby businesspeople have provided some assistance. Workers insisted on the need for permanent housing, saying they were afraid to

return to their damaged homes. They also reported a severe shortage of toilet facilities at the shelter.

Infrastructure and property damage across Nuwara Eliya District is unprecedented. Cities like Nuwara Eliya, Kandapola, and Ragala are among the worst hit. Thousands of acres of vegetable farms have been wiped out. Roads connecting Nuwara Eliya with Kandy and Badulla remain closed. While the road between Nuwara Eliya and Hatton is partially accessible, many segments have been damaged by landslides and massive stonefalls.



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