

## **From great adversity comes great strength – A Story from India and Sri Lanka**

In 1983, civil war broke out in Sri Lanka. Tamil refugees fled the country in the tens of thousands and set up camps in Tamil Nadu, India. They soon formed the Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR) and were instrumental in creating projects to improve conditions in health, education, human rights, advocacy and skills training in the camps.

In 1984, PWRDF partnered with OfERR. Although the civil war ended in May 2009, and many refugees have returned to Sri Lanka, there are still more than 70,000 Sri Lankans living in southern India, spread over 113 camps. There is much work to do – just trying to obtain birth certificates for the 20,000 or more children born in the camps is a daunting task. But finding birth and marriage certificates for the parents who fled with nothing but the clothes on their backs adds to the complexity of the situation.

PWRDF supports OfERR's development, relief and rehabilitation projects in India, as well as its programs in Sri Lanka assisting displaced people. Working out of offices in Tamil Nadu, India and Sri Lanka, OfERR provides education for all children, helping to facilitate college and university education, health, nutrition, vocational training, self-help groups, mental health care, counselling, income generation and medical services. OfERR also helps navigate the complex return process for refugees. They have worked continuously on returning refugees to Sri Lanka, coordinating the complex process through negotiating with both Indian and Sri Lankan governments, acquiring identity documents and preparing for the actual trip home.