

Testimony by Fabrice CARBONNE,  
Head of Base in Trincomalee from April 2005 to June 2006

I was 26 when I arrived in Trincomalee to be ACF Head of Base. It was my first mission with ACF, and I stayed there during 14 months. The relationships I have had the chance to build with the team in Trincomalee will stay forever one of the most powerful things of my life. I have loved this team and I guess I have been loved by them. We have been through a lot of difficult time together. But there was in Trincomalee a wonderful spirit, like a big family: ACF was their NGO.

For every loss and birth within the staff, a collect was organized. For each birthday with no exception cakes and delicacies were distributed in the morning, with tea, before going to the field... After the working hours, a lot of people used to stay in the office and discuss, in small groups ... And when I once told them, joking, that I was not going to count that as overtime, they answered me that they felt more comfortable there.

ACF had an office in Muthur - a sub-base attached to the main base in Trincomalee – from where we could carry out our programs in the South part of the area. As expatriates we went very often in Muthur to monitor the programs or support and control the administrative and logistic issues of the sub-base. We sometimes stayed for the whole night. It was important sometimes to stay there also just to get the time to talk and live together. When I would say to the staff that I'd come and stay for the night, they were often happy with that. They knew that we were going to do an informal meeting to discuss about a lot of things. They could claim during that time. Once they asked me, with a petition signed by everyone, to put in place a water fountain because the water from the well didn't taste very good.

All these moments were time shared, often colloquial. It was friendly. These evening were often fascinating, full of respect but also relaxed.

Dinner time was always the same ritual: they gave me a large portion of an ultra spicy rice and curry saying that this time, for me, they didn't add a lot of spices. And it finished always in the same way: I suffocated and cried grumbling about spices, they wept with laughter.

I will always remember their smiles. Some of them couldn't speak English. In that case, another type of communication was appearing, through eyes contacts, through smiles. There are in human relationships a lot of other ways to communicate than words. I have really understood this in Sri Lanka.

The first word coming into my mind when I think about the persons killed in Muthur is innocence. Most of them were boys and girls just going out of childhood. They were persons who had decided to involve themselves alongside vulnerable people to help them. And they thought it was great to do this job. I remember a lot of discussion with some of them regarding their humanitarian commitment and what it meant for them: they were proud of it.