

Response to the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre by DER
Touristik, 2 June (German version)

Reference: The report, 'Dark Clouds over the Sunshine Paradise' published
by Society for Threatened Peoples, February 2015

„Since the end of the conflict situation, we have observed increasing development in the tourism industry in both northern and southern Sri Lanka. In principle, we welcome this development, as it brings with it the creation of essential jobs and economic strengthening to regions of Sri Lanka that were less developed in the past.

At this stage, we, as travel agents, have no influence over this development locally. Nevertheless, it is with concern that we receive your information. In particular, the circumstances of restricted access to the sea for the local population were previously unknown to us. We are asking our local partners to communicate to us the information they have concerning this. The extent to which possibilities for action arise for us from this situation cannot yet be determined.

We have been actively involved in Sri Lanka for several years and also assume responsibility beyond our core business in tourism. Following the Tsunami in 2004, we volunteered to fund eight preschools. What began as disaster relief has turned into an ongoing commitment. We provide continuous financial support to the Hemas Outreach Foundation. Through this, further preschools have been built over the past ten years, above all in remote regions. In addition, the schools are operated, teachers are trained and parents are supported through accompanying programs. The 41st of these schools was inaugurated in November 2014 and at least one additional school construction project to be funded by DER Touristik is planned in Sri Lanka for 2015.

Negative developments in terms of human rights arise in many countries. From our perspective, this is particularly regrettable when it occurs in connection with tourism. Unfortunately, we often encounter situations in which there is no possibility for action on the part of the travel agent. On no account do we consider a boycott of certain travel destinations to be a sensible solution. It is precisely through tourism that transparency is created, allowing environmental crimes and social abuses to be seen and thus brought to the focus of public attention. Turning a blind eye with a travel boycott would certainly send the wrong signal.

We wish you continued success for your work and would be pleased to receive information from you again in future. We would also be happy to maintain a dialogue with you.

Please be aware that this reply is for all DER Touristik operators.“

