

Media Release

SIR JOHN HOLMES, UN UNDER SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR VISIT TO SRI LANKA

The United Nations Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Sir John Holmes visited Sri Lanka on 26th and 27th of April on the invitation of the Government. During his visit, Sir John Holmes had discussions with President Mahinda Rajapaksa Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe and several other senior officials. He also visited the relief centres accommodating displaced people in Vavuniya and the Omanthai transit point where displaced persons escaping from the LTTE are received by the GOSL.

Sir John Holmes's visit took place against the background of the humanitarian operations launched by the Sri Lankan Security Forces which recently resulted in the liberation of approximately 110,000 civilians.

In order to brief Sir John Holmes of the measures taken to facilitate the large number of IDPs Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama chaired a meeting with the Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe. Secretary Foreign Affairs, Dr. Palitha Kohona, Secretary/ Healthcare and Nutrition Dr. Athula Kahandaliyanage, Secretary Ministry of Social Services and Social Welfare, Ms. V. Jegarasasingam, Secretary/ Ministry of Justice Mr. Suhada Gamlath and the Commissioner-General for Essential Services, Mr. S.B Divarathne were also present.

The Government side explained in detail the progress made in expediting required shelter, food, sanitation and other needs for the displaced persons in the light of the sudden influx of people since April 20th. Significant measures have been taken to ensure the wellbeing of the displaced civilians, and both sides discussed at length the numerous steps that could be taken to further enhance the relief effort. The

Government reiterated that it will be working in close cooperation with the UN agencies, NGOs and ICRC on multiple issues related to provision of protection and assistance.

Secretary, Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition informed that his Ministry, in consultation with the relevant stake holders have formulated a “Master Plan of Action” to tackle the emergency medical situation in the Vavuniya region. He added that several foreign agencies and governments have already stepped in to enhance the medical facilities in the area. In this regard a field hospital donated by the French Government is to be set up in Chettikulam.

The Commissioner General of Essential Services outlined the continuous supply of food, shelter and other basic services that are being provided to the IDPs. He also added that arrangements have been made to send food and medicine for people still trapped within the Safe Zone.

Secretary, Ministry of Justice in his capacity as the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, briefed Sir John Holmes on the measures taken to rehabilitate ex-combatants. He added that ex combatants are presently being rehabilitated in three sites.

Secretary, Ministry of Social Services and Social Welfare elaborated on the psycho-social services and special programmes conducted among the displaced persons especially targeting the elderly, disabled, women and children.

With regard to the civilians still trapped in the “no fire zone”, the Government reiterated its commitment to continue to send food and medical supplies, despite the fact that much of these provisions are being appropriated by the LTTE. The Government repeated its position that it has not, and will not target civilians while defeating terrorists in the Safe Zone and the Government will continue its ongoing civilian medical evacuation operation together with the ICRC.

During his visit to the relief centres in Vavuniya where a majority of the recently liberated civilians are accommodated, Sir John Holmes held discussions with the Minister of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, Rishad Bathiudeen, the Competent Authority appointed by the Government to oversee the emergency relief services, Major General G.A. Chandrasiri and the GA, Vavuniya.

At the conclusion of his visit, Sir John called on donors to respond to the humanitarian needs in Sri Lanka and announced that the United Nations was allocating a further US Dollars 10 million from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Sir John also conveyed the willingness of the UN to assist Sri Lanka in post-conflict issues, including rehabilitation of ex-combatants.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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