

Presidential Secretariat *Sri Lanka*

Positive sign in UN – Sri Lanka relations: UN Secretary General



The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and President Mahinda Rajapaksa had a telephone discussion this evening where the matters discussed centered on, inter alia, the humanitarian situation in the North, efforts of the Government to ensure the supply of food, medicines and other assistance to the IDPs, conditions in the IDP villages, political initiatives by the Government and the recently published statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

President Rajapaksa described the resistance by the LTTE to release the civilians held by it, thus causing severe hardship to these persons entrapped by the LTTE, as well as the threats and dangers to those fleeing the LTTE hold to Government held areas.

The President told the UNSG that there was new evidence, including photographs which would be supplied, of the LTTE having built bunkers for its armed cadres in the midst of the civilians it was holding. However, despite the threats of harm by the LTTE there were increasing numbers coming over to the Government held areas. This was seen as a positive sign, as the continued moving of civilians away from the shrinking LTTE held area would help ease the confinement of the civilians.

Giving the latest figures of those who had come to the Government held areas, President Rajapaksa said that the number who had come over to the government area today was 1,565 and that as at 6 pm today the total number of civilians who had fled the LTTE into the safety of government areas was 45,519, and the numbers were rapidly increasing.

In response to concerns expressed by the UNSG about the food situation for IDPs, President Rajapaksa said that adequate food was being supplied, with larger vessels now being used for transport of food and essentials, and supplies being done through a regular turnaround of vessels, despite resistance and obstacles to this by the LTTE. He said that statistics regarding supply of food had been sent to Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN to be given to the Secretary General.

Commenting on the military offensive against the LTTE, the President mentioned that every restraint is being maintained by the military, with clear orders given against firing heavy weapons at areas with civilians, including the areas held by the LTTE. He reiterated that no firing whatever was being carried out on the No Fire or Safe Zones declared by the security forces.

In discussing conditions in the IPD villages President Rajapaksa said that the facilities were being steadily improved.

In response to a query by the UNSC about telephone facilities for the IDPs, the President said that once the security screening was completed such facilities could be provided. He also cautioned the SG that at present it would be possible for some handlers of LTTE's suicide cadres to have access to such elements via telephone which could result in major security related consequences. Some of the previous experiences where suicide killers had been given instructions from remote locations via telephone were shared with the Secretary General.

On the political process, President Rajapaksa apprised the UNSG that he expects the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) members to respond to his call to participate in discussion of the political proposals that are now before the All Party Representative Conference (APRC). He awaits a positive response to his repeated calls for such participation from even some members of the TNA, who are prepared to overcome threats by the LTTE in this regard.

The widest possible political discussion will be maintained among all of the polity, the President said.

In discussing the recent statement by the UNHCHR, President Rajapaksa regretted that adequate consultations had not taken place before such a statement was issued. Had this been done matters could have been clarified. He had advised the Minister of Foreign Affairs to have a full response on behalf of the Government in this connection, which will be announced shortly.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed this and said a continuous dialogue between the Government and the United Nations on the related matters would be most useful.

The UNSG concluded that there is increasing cooperation evident between the UN and the Government of Sri Lanka and said this is a positive sign in the continuing relationship.

The Secretary to the President Lalith Weeratunga and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Rohitha Bogollagama were present during the telephone conference which began at 6.30 pm and lasted nearly 17 minutes.

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