

Joint Statement by the GoSL & the UN at the Conclusion of UN Secretary-General's visit to Sri Lanka

Following is the joint statement by the Government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations at the conclusion of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's visit to Sri Lanka on 23 May

At the invitation of Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, paid a visit to Sri Lanka. During the course of his visit, he held talks with the President, Foreign Minister as well as other senior leaders of Sri Lanka. During his stay, he also consulted other relevant stakeholders, members of international humanitarian agencies and civil society. The Secretary-General visited the internally displaced persons (IDP) sites at Vavuniya and overflew the conflict area, near Mullaitivu that was the scene of the conflict.

President Rajapaksa welcomed the Secretary-General as the highest dignitary to visit Sri Lanka in the post-conflict phase. This was a reflection of the close cooperation between Sri Lanka and the United Nations as well as Sri Lanka's commitment to work with the United Nations in the future.

President Rajapaksa and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon agreed that following the end of operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Sri Lanka had entered a new post-conflict beginning. In this context, the Government of Sri Lanka faced many immediate and long-term challenges relating to issues of relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and reconciliation. While addressing these critical issues, it was agreed that the new situation offered opportunities for long-term development of the north and for re-establishing democratic institutions and electoral politics after 2 ½ decades. The Government expressed its commitment to ensure the economic and political empowerment of the people of the north through its programmes.

President Rajapaksa and the Secretary-General agreed that addressing the aspirations and grievances of all communities and working towards a lasting political solution was fundamental to ensuring long-term socio-economic development. The Secretary-General welcomed the assurance of the President of Sri Lanka contained in his statement in Parliament on 19 May 2009 that a national solution acceptable to all sections of people will be evolved. President Rajapaksa expressed his firm resolve to proceed with the implementation of the 13th Amendment, as well as to begin a broader dialogue with all parties, including the Tamil parties in the new circumstances, to further enhance this process and to bring about lasting peace and development in Sri Lanka.

President Rajapaksa and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon discussed a series of areas in which the United Nations will assist the ongoing efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka in addressing the future challenges and opportunities.

With regard to IDPs, the United Nations will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the IDPs now in Vavuniya and Jaffna. The Government will continue to provide access to humanitarian agencies. The Government will expedite the necessary basic and civil infrastructure as well as means of livelihood necessary for the IDPs to resume their normal lives at the earliest. The Secretary-General welcomed the announcement by the Government expressing its intention to dismantle the welfare villages at the earliest, as outlined in the Plan to resettle the bulk of IDPs and call for its early implementation.

The Government seeks the cooperation of the international community in mine clearing, which is an essential prerequisite to expediting the early return of IDPs.

The Secretary-General called for donor assistance towards the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) jointly launched by the Government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations, which supports the relief, shelter and humanitarian needs of those in IDP sites.

President Rajapaksa and the Secretary-General recognized the large number of former child soldiers forcibly recruited by the LTTE as an important issue in the post-conflict context. President Rajapaksa reiterated his firm policy of zero tolerance in relation to child recruitment. In cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), child-friendly procedures have been established for their "release and surrender" and rehabilitation in Protective Accommodation Centres. The objective of the rehabilitation process presently underway is to reintegrate former child soldiers into society as productive citizens. The Secretary-General expressed satisfaction on the progress already made by the Government in cooperation with UNICEF and encouraged Sri Lanka to adopt similar policies and procedures relating to former child soldiers in the north.

President Rajapaksa informed the Secretary-General regarding ongoing initiatives relating to rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants. In addition to the ongoing work by the Office of the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, a National Framework for the Integration of Ex-combatants into Civilian Life is under preparation, with the assistance of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Sri Lanka reiterated its strongest commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, in keeping with international human rights standards and Sri Lanka's international obligations. The Secretary-General underlined the importance of an accountability process for addressing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The Government will take measures to address those grievances.

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