

SRI LANKA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Improve access to national protection and humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north and northeast of Sri Lanka.
- Minimise internal displacement and provide alternatives to flight from regions of instability.
- Stabilise displaced communities and promote conditions for durable solutions.
- Facilitate return and reintegration of displaced populations, with particular attention to vulnerable groups.
- Advocate the implementation of policies, which protect the rights of the displaced and other victims of the conflict.
- Help build the capacity of the Government, national NGOs and displaced communities to respond to displacement and bring about lasting solutions.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED, AND CONSTRAINTS

There were significant positive political developments in Sri Lanka earlier this year which halted the ethnic conflict that had been plaguing the island over the last 18 years. These developments in December 2001 resulted in renewed commitment to the peace process, and a cease-fire agreement was reached with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002. The cease-fire is being monitored by an international monitoring mission, and peace talks are scheduled to commence between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE in early August 2002 in Thailand.

With increasing public confidence in the peace process and LTTE assurances to Muslims and up-country Tamils that their return to places of origin located in former conflict zones would be welcomed, there has been a steady and spontaneous return movement of IDPs to their places of origin. UNHCR estimates by means of its Rapid Village Assessments that over 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have already moved within and to the former areas of conflict during the first six months of 2002. The largest number of IDPs (37,251) have spontaneously returned to Jaffna peninsula, followed by 25,188 to Kilinochchi district, 17,662 to Mullaitivu district and 1,081 families to Trincomalee district. Many IDPs have also spontaneously left the Madhu Open Relief Centre and are returning to Manthai West.

In addition, more than 1,000 refugees have spontaneously returned from India to Sri Lanka according to government sources. At present, 600 of some 64,000 Sri Lankan refugees living in government camps in India have expressed to UNHCR their desire to return home. It should be noted that UNHCR maintains its position that conditions in return areas are not yet conducive to facilitate large-scale repatriation from India at present.

UNHCR is responding to these significant developments by refocusing its operations to ensure that field protection capacity and immediate response to the relief needs of returnees be improved.

While closely monitoring the situation of IDPs who have spontaneously returned

and addressing individual protection problems through appropriate interventions with the authorities, UNHCR is working towards strengthening its presence in field locations so as to better monitor the human rights situation in priority areas of return in the north and east, create conditions conducive to return and ensure that IDP's rights are respected nationwide. To this end, UNHCR has established strategic partnerships with the national Human Rights Commission and the Legal Aid Foundation of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka and works closely on issues of extortion of "taxes" by the LTTE and on assisting IDPs to obtain documentation such as identity papers and birth certificates. Underage recruitment by the LTTE continues to be of concern, and a total of 53 cases in Mullaitivu/Kilinochchi have been reported to UNHCR. UNHCR also actively supports UNICEF's activities in the prevention of child recruitment.

A UNHCR assessment confirmed extensive damage to infrastructure and housing and limited access to sanitation and water in areas where large numbers of IDPs were returning, especially in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts. To meet immediate relief needs of vulnerable IDPs returning to these areas, UNHCR has so far distributed non-food relief items to 6,579 families in Mullaitivu/Kilinochchi districts and 1,378 families in Mannar district, as well as non-food relief items and emergency shelter materials to 588 families in Trincomalee district.

In IDP welfare centres where some 100,000 IDPs are currently residing, UNHCR focuses on issues of sexual and gender-based violence, and implements projects to address the needs of vulnerable groups, such as the psycho-social projects

targeting children and women, domestic violence and reproductive health. UNHCR also promotes self-reliance amongst IDPs in these centres through the provision of life skills and vocational training.

UNHCR's activities in Mannar and Vavuniya support the Government's relocation programmes through the provision of micro-credit facilities self-reliance among IDP families. A key project currently implemented in Mannar involves support for the rehabilitation of a reservoir, which is the main source of water supply in the area.

The Government has a major role in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In order to build the co-ordination and planning capacity of the Government to provide assistance to IDPs and refugee returnees, UNHCR has established a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees (MRRR) which is tasked with the responsibility for relief, rehabilitation, and durable solutions for persons directly affected by the conflict. UNHCR has assisted the MRRR in conducting a nationwide survey of IDPs. A preliminary report on the result of the survey is due in August 2002. With regard to resource mobilisation, the UN Country Team, of which UNHCR is a member, facilitated the launching of the Government-UN Joint Strategy for Support to Returned IDPs in early July 2002. UNHCR is tasked with lead UN responsibility for the protection of IDPs, and provision of emergency shelter and non-food items to IDPs in this Joint Strategy. In June, the Government adopted a new strategy called "The Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation, and Reconciliation and a Poverty Reduction Strategy", which

should now provide a common basis for co-ordinated Government-led activities.

As regard to a small number of urban refugees (48 persons) and asylum-seekers in Sri Lanka, UNHCR continues to provide international protection and seek durable solutions since there is no national legislation on asylum, nor opportunities for local integration. UNHCR maintains an informal working agreement with the

Immigration Authorities that no refoulement or deportation takes place for asylum-seekers and refugees for whom UNHCR intervenes. UNHCR has been negotiating with the Ministry of the Interior and the Immigration Authorities to improve the conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR continues to monitor the situation of rejected Sri Lankan asylum-seekers deported from Switzerland and other countries in Europe.

Progress as measured against indicators

Impact/ Performance Indicators	Actual progress
Access to national protection for the displaced.	Protection of the rights of IDPs has become a key focus of the Human Rights Commission. Increased awareness amongst IDPs of legal rights and access to legal services through the Legal Aid Foundation of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka. Improved co-operation between UNHCR and the network of field offices of the Human Rights Commission and Legal Aid Foundation ensuring island-wide attention to IDP rights.
Advocacy to improve policies governing the rights of IDPs and returnees and their access to durable solutions.	UNHCR continues to have access to and good working relationships with key decision-makers/advisors attached to the Government of Sri Lanka as well as the LTTE. A Policy Planning Co-ordination Unit at the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees to formulate the overall policy framework for issues governing IDPs and returnees is being set up. Nationwide registration/survey of IDPs is being carried out, with the initial results expected in July/August. UNHCR is a member of the National Co-ordinating Committee for Relief Rehabilitation and Reconciliation which <i>inter alia</i> co-ordinates strategies and programmes in the area of humanitarian assistance.
Reduction in number of IDPs in Sri Lanka.	Rapid Village Assessments have been carried out by UNHCR in collaboration with Government Agents indicate that 103,000 people have spontaneously returned to their places of origin. UNHCR continues to monitor conditions in priority return areas and provide immediate humanitarian assistance.
Number of Sri Lankan refugees returning from India.	Some 600 persons in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu, India have expressed the desire to return to Sri Lanka. UNHCR has assisted 3 priority cases to return to Sri Lanka. Over 100 such persons are expected to return within the next six months. 1,000 persons have returned spontaneously from India to Sri Lanka.

**REVISED OBJECTIVES AND
PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY –
DECEMBER 2002**

Although UNHCR's overall objectives remain unchanged, the steady progress of the peace process and the consequent return of IDPs and refugees to their places of origin have resulted in a change of priorities. UNHCR's priorities now include the monitoring of human rights in returnee areas, ensuring that the rights of IDPs and returnees are respected. In addition, UNHCR will continue to provide assistance to meet the immediate needs of IDPs and refugees in priority return areas. In order to make the priority operational, UNHCR is in the process of restructuring its field presence to improve capacity for providing protection and immediate response to the relief needs of returnees countrywide. While every effort is being made to fund these additional activities within the 2002 approved Annual Programme for Sri Lanka, the scale and momentum of spontaneous returns may require the launching of a supplementary programme during the second half of 2002.

As part of the restructuring of UNHCR operations in Sri Lanka, the Field Office areas of operations have been re-organised

as follows: Field Office Jaffna: Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mallavi; Field Office Vavuniya: Vavuniya, Mannar, Madhu, Trincomalee and Batticola, Field Office Colombo: Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Colombo Airport and other IDP/returnee locations in central and southern Sri Lanka.

Protection activities will continue to focus on voluntary return/movement of IDPs, conditions in return areas, underage recruitment, extortion, sexual and gender-based violence and access to documentation such as identity cards, birth, marriage and death certificates.

Negotiations with the Government are also underway to prepare for organised voluntary repatriation of Tamil refugees in India when conditions in Sri Lanka are deemed conducive.

Emergency preparedness and contingency planning continues for two scenarios: 1) a massive, spontaneous return, at a pace exceeding 5,000 families per week, that would overwhelm the resources of the Government and international actors; and 2) a breakdown in the peace process and a return to conflict, leading to new displacement.

Annual Programme Budget			
Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
6,590,176	6,652,616	7,157,154	2,851,000