



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

**Country: Democratic Socialist Republic of
Sri Lanka**

Planning Year: 2004

2004 COUNTRY OPERATION PLAN: Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Part I: Executive Committee Summary

a. Context and Beneficiary Population

UNHCR commenced its operations in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in 1987 in connection with the Indian - Sri Lankan peace agreement in order to support the repatriation of refugees from India. Large-scale repatriation took place in two waves, from 1987 to 1989 and from 1992 to 1995, resulting in the return of more than 100,000 refugees. Since 1995, the flow of returnees diminished due to recurrence of the conflict, leaving an estimated 85,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India, 64,000 of which reside in refugee camps.

As part of its repatriation activities, UNHCR assisted both returnees and the communities to which they were returning. The sustained nature of the ethnic conflict since 1983 has in addition created widespread displacement of people throughout the island. Almost 800,000 were displaced internally. Some of these persons have been uprooted for more than ten years, often in cycles of five or more separate incidents of displacement. Many returnees from India added to the number of the internally displaced as the conflict was renewed with greater intensity shortly after they had been repatriated. As a consequence, UNHCR extended its protection and assistance to the displaced, a role endorsed by the Secretary-General in 1991 and reaffirmed in 1997 and recognised in the second Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Government of Sri Lanka in 1993.

The cease-fire Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in February 2002 between the new Government and the LTTE brought hostilities to an end, and revitalized hopes that peace may finally arrive, and that return in safety and dignity for the displaced as well as refugees in India, may become a reality. The commitment of both parties to the peace process have been demonstrated by a series of confidence building measures undertaken by the GOVERNMENT and the LTTE, the latter also being permitted to establish offices in GOVERNMENT controlled areas under the terms of the MoU. Most significantly, the opening of key roads in the North, coupled with eased restrictions on the movement of people and goods, have created a positive environment and enhanced the prospects for peace. The growing confidence in the peace process amongst the general population of Sri Lanka was demonstrated by the continuing spontaneous movement of IDPs and refugee returnees to areas in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Between January 2002 and July 2003, 312,000 persons returned. In addition, during the same period, 2,800 refugees from Tamil Nadu in southern India spontaneously returned across the Palk Straits.

The core challenge for UNHCR in this process is to ensure access of displaced persons to national protection, while urgently and effectively responding to the protection and immediate material needs of spontaneous returns. Whereas almost a third of the internally displaced population have returned since the beginning of the cease-fire, 300,000 persons are still waiting for durable solutions. Both tasks, the stabilisation of the returning population as well as to find durable solutions for the

remaining displaced, are formidable challenges, which if not addressed appropriately might directly and negatively affect the trust of many in the peace process.

The population in the North and East of Sri Lanka was severely affected by the protracted conflict. However, displaced populations from the North and East also reside in the West of Sri Lanka. The categories of persons that UNHCR works to protect and assist include the following:

1. Persons returning to their place of origin or other locations within Sri Lanka;
2. Persons returning voluntarily from southern India and other locations where they sought refuge/asylum;
3. Persons who voluntarily continue to remain in Government welfare centres and require assistance to seek a durable solution;
4. Persons who remain internally displaced elsewhere, and require protection and assistance.

These categories include extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) who require special assistance. These EVIs include female-headed households, the handicapped, children and adolescents.

UNHCR additional role and sectional responsibilities in the post cease-fire context has been defined in the Government and the United Nations 'Joint Strategy to Meet the Immediate Needs of Returned Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)', which was launched by the Government on 10 July 2002. Through this joint strategy the Government and UN have developed an integrated programme to cope with the immediate and initial reintegration of spontaneous returnees into their home communities, while protecting and assisting vulnerable groups. In return areas, this includes both IDPs and those in the community who remained in situ. According to the joint strategy, UNHCR has been tasked to be the focal point agency for the provision of non-food relief items, emergency shelter and protection. Jointly with the Office of the Resident Coordinator and UNDP, the office has supported the Government through strengthening its co-ordination and oversight capacity to address issues affecting returning IDPs.

The High Commissioner's Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs) initiative is the basis for UNHCR's active engagement in addressing transitional issues to ensure sustainability of return. Given its reduced level of assistance in 2004, UNHCR has been actively promoting joint planning and co-operation with Multilateral Group actors – including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and UN agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and FAO.

UNHCR co-ordinates its protection and assistance programme directly with the Government. Through a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees and the Office of the Commissioner General, it ensure that the programme is derived from national priorities. The Ministry and the Office of the Commissioner General, define and co-ordinate the Government's policy on relief

Beneficiary Population

Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Sri Lanka

Main Goal

Refugees and asylum-seekers have access to adequate protection and assistance in Sri Lanka

Principle Objectives**Related Outputs**

- Provide adequate protection and assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in Sri Lanka.

- Promote a national refugee protection scheme based on the 1951 Convention, while raising awareness of international protection standards for refugees and asylum seekers.

- Ensure security and basic rights exist for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Ensure access and maintain adequate asylum procedures in place, including appeal mechanisms.
- Establish formal, legal basis for asylum procedures and standards of treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Monitor that refugees and asylum-seekers receive acceptable standards of assistance.
- Provide durable solutions to recognised refugees
- Short of acceding to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, continue to ensure that asylum procedures are run on a formal legal basis.