

Sri Lanka

Main objectives

- Promote and protect the rights of IDPs and returnees, with special emphasis on traumatized and vulnerable persons and others of concern to UNHCR.
- Address the immediate humanitarian needs of spontaneous returnees and those who remain in displacement.
- Promote durable solutions for the remaining IDPs and facilitate preparations for the organized, voluntary return of refugees.
- Improve policies and conditions for displaced persons and returnees through capacity-building of government institutions and national NGOs.



Planning figures		
Population	Jan 2005	Dec 2005
IDPs	311,000	241,000
IDP returnees	75,000	70,000
Returnees	7,000	8,500
Refugees	42	28
Asylum-seekers	22	26
Total	393,064	319,554

Total requirements: USD 8,870,031

Working environment

Recent developments

Formal peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were suspended in April 2003. The LTTE had withdrawn from negotiations citing a lack of progress in improving living conditions in the north and east. However, the ceasefire continued to hold in 2004 and access to the conflict-affected areas was maintained. At the time of writing, it seems likely that peace negotiations will resume in due course. The LTTE declared its willingness to restart negotiations on the basis of their Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal of 30 October 2003. The Government is currently

formulating its own preconditions. It is predicted that the springboard for continuing negotiations will be the previous agreement by the parties to "a federal structure within a single State". The issue of power-sharing between the south and the north and east will be the subject of complex, and most probably extremely protracted, negotiations between the LTTE and the Government. Notwithstanding the suspension of peace talks, there is widespread optimism about the peace process, as all parties seem to be committed to a negotiated settlement.

Between 1983 and 2001, the conflict produced over a million refugees and IDPs. At the time of the ceasefire agreement in 2002, there were 732,000 IDPs, in addition to 84,000 Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu in southern India. Since then, there has been an uninterrupted flow of spontaneously returning IDPs. By the end of July 2004, over 371,000 IDPs had returned home to former conflict areas. It is expected that the return of IDPs to the north and east will continue in 2005, albeit at a reduced pace, given the vulnerability of the remaining displaced people and the obstacles they face. In 2005, there will be a greater focus on the needs of those who cannot, or do not want to, return to their places of origin, for lack of security or reasons of ethnicity, political opinion or vulnerability. In addition to returning IDPs, a steady stream of refugees has spontaneously returned to Sri Lanka from India. Since February 2002, 9,496 refugees from camps in Tamil Nadu have returned across the Palk Strait, and UNHCR has facilitated the priority return of 2,345 refugees by air.

High-level international support for the peace process and reconstruction of Sri Lanka was demonstrated in June 2003 at the Tokyo Donor Conference, where USD 4.5 billion was pledged. However, those funds have in effect been blocked by the lack of subsequent political progress. Consequently donors are currently negotiating alternative mechanisms for the release of development funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka.

Constraints

In order to achieve lasting peace, fundamental issues need to be addressed, including human



security and minority rights. The general human rights situation in Sri Lanka has improved since the ceasefire. However, violations of human rights continue, especially, but not exclusively, in areas controlled by the LTTE. Such violations include forced recruitment, including child soldiers; hostage-taking in retaliation for desertion by cadres; extortion; and assaults and killing of political opponents. While instances of inter-ethnic conflict are decreasing, deep mistrust and apprehension continues to linger in some communities, and there is a risk of occasional localized violence.



Returnees at a UNHCR distribution centre for families in Mallavi. *UNHCR / R. Chalasani*

UNHCR will thus support various community-based monitoring, intervention and capacity-building mechanisms.

There are other major obstacles in the way of solutions for all those who remain internally displaced: the presence of landmines; the lack of investment in the restoration of basic infrastructure in the war-torn areas; the lack of focus on integrating IDPs who in 2002 registered their preference to stay where they were living; and property restitution difficulties. Returning IDPs find a patchwork of shattered

livelihoods in broken communities. Agricultural land or alternative income-generating opportunities have to be identified and created for a large number of landless IDPs.

While commitments made at the Tokyo Conference can address most of these concerns, many donors have made their contributions conditional on a resumption of the peace talks, adherence to the ceasefire Memorandum of Understanding, and greater respect for basic human rights.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

UNHCR's presence in key return areas will ensure effective protection and timely assistance to IDPs. It is widely recognized that UNHCR's monitoring of the human rights of IDPs and returnees is both objective and impartial. UNHCR will maintain its capacity to meet the demands expected of it in 2005 by enhancing the field protection network and sharpening the focus of programmes to find durable solutions for those still displaced.

Some 57,000 Sri Lankan refugees remained in camps in Tamil Nadu as of June 2004. UNHCR will continue to work closely with the Governments of Sri Lanka and India to facilitate the repatriation of priority cases and prepare for organized voluntary repatriation. This approach will be sustained until the Sri Lankan environment becomes conducive to large-scale organized voluntary returns.

The Office will implement and support initiatives at the local level to address concerns over human rights abuse, SGBV, minority rights, statelessness, and property and land restitution.

Assistance

Whereas most activities focus on UNHCR's protection role, the Office will implement some assistance activities to address the immediate humanitarian needs of spontaneous returnees and IDPs. These interventions entail assistance in the form of community development and basic household support, which will include monitoring of their general well-being. Interventions will also support initiatives by the Government of Sri Lanka to find relocation or local integration alternatives for those who are still displaced.

Desired impact

UNHCR aims to ensure that refugees and IDPs have access to national protection and to durable solutions. It will respond effectively to the immediate humanitarian needs of persons of concern, in particular, vulnerable groups at greatest risk. The situation in areas of return will be monitored to ensure

that the rights of returning IDPs and refugees are protected. In addition, the Office has made various transitional reintegration arrangements.

Organization and implementation

Management structure

In 2005, UNHCR will operate with a total of 115 staff members: 35 internationals including three JPOs and 15 international UNVs, and 80 nationals including nine national UNVs.

The UNHCR representation in Colombo is responsible for the overall management of the programme and for liaison with the Government, embassies and NGOs. To ensure adequate presence in the field, UNHCR will maintain offices in six locations. The sub-office in Vavuniya will cover field offices in Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa, with sub-office Jaffna covering field office Killinochchi.

Coordination

The Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs) initiative is the basis of UNHCR's approach to transitional issues. UNHCR will actively promote joint planning and cooperation among Multilateral Group actors - such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and various UN agencies. Furthermore, the programme strategy includes a joint UNDP, ILO, UNICEF and UNHCR 4Rs project in the north and the east.

UNHCR coordinates its protection and assistance programme directly with the Government of Sri Lanka. Through a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation (MRRR), UNHCR ensures that programmes accord with government and national priorities. The MRRR defines and coordinates the government's policy on relief and rehabilitation assistance to IDPs and returning refugees. As part of its support to the ministry, UNHCR has encouraged and facilitated the continuation of the Policy, Planning and Coordination Unit to assist the Government in formulating overall policies regarding the protection and relief needs of refugees and IDPs.

Offices
Colombo
Batticaloa
Jaffna
Killinochchi
Mannar
Trincomalee
Vavuniya

Partners
Government agencies
District Government Agents
Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation, and Reconciliation
North East Provincial Council

NGOs
Association of Women with Disabilities
Bridge Asia Japan
Campaign for Development and Solidarity (FORUT)
Danish Refugee Council
Foundation for Co-Existence
Jaffna Social Action Centre
<i>Lanka Jatika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya</i>
Peace and Community Action
Rural Development Foundation
Sri Lanka Red Cross Society
Women's Development Centre

Others
Asian Development Bank
<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i>
FAO
ILO
IOM
Legal Aid Foundation of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka
National Human Rights Commission
UNDP
UNICEF
UNV
WFP
WHO
World Bank

Budget (USD)	
Activities and services	Annual Programme
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,748,758
Community services	709,332
Domestic needs	904,698
Legal assistance	2,067,890
Operational support (to agencies)	546,435
Transport/logistics	142,249
Total operations	7,119,362
Programme support	1,750,669
Total	8,870,031