

Stay The Course, Urges Buhne, Appealing To The International Community

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The United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) Neil Buhne reiterated the urgent need to stay the course in helping displaced persons and returned communities when briefing donors assist ing the work of humanitarian organisations supporting Sri Lanka's national efforts.

"The job is not yet done. It is still a critical period and we ask for your continued support to meet the remaining crucial needs," Buhne said. He also stressed that the effectiveness of assistance during this period will affect both the people directly and Sri Lanka's overall development. "The welfare of the returned people, is an important element in reconciliation and ultimately, sustainable peace and development".

There has been substantial progress over the last months and since late 2009, approximately 200,000 people have returned to their villages in the North. Although a declining number of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are with host families, it is estimated that 70,000 remain displaced or are in transit sites near their home areas. Less than 35,000 IDPs remain in emergency sites.

Notable contributions to humanitarian efforts come from demining actors of both government, and national and international agencies, who have cleared and released land, paving the way for the resettlement of the displaced. A shelter grant of USD 220 (Rs25,000) per family has been received by 55,000 families along with an equal number of non-food item kits. Four thousand permanent homes are under construction and a further 50,000 has been pledged by the Indian Government.

So far in 2010, over 30,000 MT of food was provided to nearly 750,000 beneficiaries in the North who are reliant on food assistance. However, rebuilding livelihoods and agricultural productivity remains a common goal. Some 24,000 households have received poultry and seeds, water pumps and crop sprayers to support the ongoing Yala season cultivation of 10,600 acres. The upcoming Maha will target around 50,000 households and aims to cultivate 130,000 acres of abandoned land.

Combined efforts have ensured that over 300,000 people have had access to safe water and sanitation facilities. Common services such as health, nutrition and education have also made significant improvements in an effort to normalise life in return areas and for those in camps.

“The Job Is Not Yet Done. It Is Still A Critical Period And We Ask For Your Continued Support To Meet The Remaining Crucial Needs,” Buhne Said. He Also Stressed That The Effectiveness Of Assistance During This Period Will Affect Both The People Directly And Sri Lanka’s Overall Development. “The Welfare Of The Returned People, Is An Important Element In Reconciliation And Ultimately, Sustainable Peace And Development”.

Despite these real achievements, returned persons remain vulnerable, needing support until livelihoods are restored. Funding shortages have reduced the capacity to deliver immediate assistance to the residual camp population and returning communities. There are shortfalls for all sectors, but the largest are for work on economic recovery and infrastructure, water and sanitation, agriculture and health.

Although generous donations of about USD 125 million have made these response operations possible, USD 165 million more is needed to cover gaps for activities planned by the UN and humanitarian organisations during the remainder of 2010 in support of the national programmes.

Over the last year and a half, through a broad partnership in support of Sri Lankan national efforts, hundreds of thousands of people who had to flee from fighting to safety, were given humanitarian assistance. The RC/HC says “difficult, hard, and urgent work was done. Lives were saved and people helped to get back their strength to rebuild lives”, he added “funding for this work came from the Government, people throughout Sri Lanka and from donor governments. However, as all of us know, there is much more to be done – recently returned people are still vulnerable.”