
Diplomats get a first hand look at IDP camps

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By Jamila Najmuddin Foreign diplomats in Sri Lanka were taken to camps housing internally displaced people in Vavuniya, yesterday, and given a first hand view of the conditions at these camps and the measures taken by the government to assist the displaced people, a foreign ministry official said. Foreign Secretary Dr. Palitha Kohona, Resettlement Minister Rishard Bathiudeen and senior officials from the foreign ministry accompanied the diplomats who were flown to Vavuniya via Anuradhapura last morning.

The diplomats who visited Vavuniya were the French, Russian, Indonesian and Korean Ambassadors, the Deputy Chief of Mission of Japan, his second secretary, and the Maldivian High Commissioner. The Director General of the United Nations also visited Vavuniya along with the diplomats. According to the official, the diplomats held discussions with the Vavuniya GA, senior commanders of the security forces and several of the local authorities who were assisting the IDPs at the camps. The diplomats also visited the injured at Vavuniya Hospital. "The diplomats are extremely happy that the government has facilitated such a visit. They were briefed on all the facilities provided by the government to the civilians and the conditions in the IDP camps. It was a very positive trip," the foreign ministry official said. The diplomats also spoke to those living in the IDP camps when they visited Manic Farm and two other transit points. A lengthy discussion was held with the Vavuniya GA and health and education officials, who gave them an overall view of the situation in Vavuniya. "The diplomats were free to exchange their views with the authorities and the IDPs. A lot of information was gathered," the official said. The Russian Ambassador, Vladimir P. Mikhailov, commended the government's concern for the welfare of the civilians and its providing them with all necessary facilities.

"When I visited the camps, the first impression I got was that the local people had indeed suffered a lot due to the 25 year war. Many problems still need to be solved but I am happy that the government is doing everything possible to address these problems," Mr. Mikhailov told Daily Mirror. He further noted that the IDP camps were developing and medical treatment was being provided to the injured. "Russia has always supported Sri Lanka in its fight against terrorism and, after visiting these camps, we will continue to support them even after the war is over, through economic development and investment in the war areas," he said. French Ambassador Mr. Michel Lummaux told Daily Mirror that the international community's main concern regarding Sri Lanka at present was the plight of the civilians and that, after his visit to Vavuniya, he was convinced that the civilians were well looked after: "They are well fed, well educated and well looked after. The children are receiving a good education and they lead a life free of danger in these camps until they are resettled in their villages. We visited Manic Farm and two other transit points and I must say that the situation in Manic Farm was better than that in the two other transit camps. Overall we were satisfied," he said. Foreign Secretary Dr. Palitha Kohona, who accompanied the diplomats, said that the international community had had a first hand assessment of the situation in Vavuniya and that the trip had been a success. He said the diplomats had witnessed the facilities provided to the IDPs and were satisfied with the well maintained camps. "It was indeed heartening to see that education facilities are also provided to the children in the IDP camps. These children are taught up to their A/Levels and many will sit for their examinations this year. We hope this will continue and we will continue to strengthen the facilities further," said Dr. Kohona. The diplomats were flown back to Colombo last evening. The visit comes in the wake of criticism levelled at the government by international human rights agencies, who charged that civilians who fled the LTTE and arrived in government controlled areas were forced into barbed wired camps and denied their liberty and freedom of movement. Human Rights Watch (HRW), which has been critical of the government's treatment of civilians, had, in its latest report, said that all civilians who managed to escape the Tamil Tigers were held by the government in "squalid military-controlled camps" and hospitals, with little access to the outside world. Courtesy: Dailymirror.lk