
UN - SRI LANKA INCREASING DIALOGUE: POSITIVE SIGN, SAYS BAN KI MOON

Wednesday, 18 March 2009

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The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and President Mahinda Rajapaksa had a telephone discussion yesterday evening on the humanitarian situation in the North, efforts of the Government to ensure the supply of food, medicines and other assistance to the IDPs, conditions in the IDP villages, political initiatives by the Government and the recently published statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

President Rajapaksa told the UNSG that the LTTE is forcibly keeping civilians hostage and are shooting at fleeing civilians. He also said that there was new evidence, including photographs which would be supplied, of the LTTE having built bunkers for its armed cadres in the midst of the civilians it was holding. However, despite the threats of harm by the LTTE there were increasing numbers coming over to the Government held areas. Giving the latest figures of those who had come to the Government held areas, President Rajapaksa said that the number of those who had come over to the government area today was 1,565 and that, as at 6 pm yesterday, the total number of civilians who had fled the LTTE into the safety of government areas was 45,519, and the numbers were rapidly increasing. In response to concerns expressed by the UNSG about the food situation for IDPs, President Rajapaksa said that adequate food was being supplied, with larger vessels now being used for transport of food and essentials, and supplies being done through a regular turnaround of vessels, despite resistance and obstacles to this by the LTTE. The President mentioned that every restraint is being maintained by the military, with clear orders given against firing heavy weapons at areas with civilians, including the areas held by the LTTE. He reiterated that no firing whatsoever was being carried out on the No Fire or Safe Zones declared by the security forces. He also said that conditions in the IDP villages were being steadily improved. In response to a query by the UNSC about telephone facilities for the IDPs, the President said that once the security screening was completed, such facilities could be provided. He also cautioned the SG that at present it would be possible for some handlers of LTTE's suicide cadres to have access to such elements via telephone which could result in major security related consequences. On the political process, President Rajapaksa apprised the UNSG that he expects the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) members to respond to his call to participate in discussion of the political proposals that are now before the All Party Representative Conference (APRC). In discussing the recent statement by the UNHCHR, President Rajapaksa regretted that adequate consultations had not taken place before such a statement was issued. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said a continuous dialogue between the Government and the United Nations on the related matters would be most useful. The UNSG concluded that there is increasing cooperation evident between the UN and the Government of Sri Lanka and said this is a positive sign in the continuing relationship. The telephone conference which began at 6.30 pm lasted nearly 17 minutes. Courtesy: dailynews.lk