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## Troops continue sweep of LTTE-held areas to rescue people

mardi, 28 avril 2009

Last Updated mardi, 28 avril 2009

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan Government on Tuesday said though the combat operations in the northern war zone have ended, troops are continuing a sweep to bring about a "total defeat" of the Tamil Tigers in the quarter-century old insurgency.

The Government said these operations were aimed at rescuing the remaining 15,000-20,000 people still held hostage by the LTTE as the United Nations pledged USD 20 million assistance for providing relief to over 1.7 lakh Tamil civilians who fled the conflict zones. United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Sir John Holmes, who was here on a three-day visit, announced USD 10 million additional assistance besides a similar amount released last week. "We need to see what does that (the halt in use of heavy weapons) mean on the ground. I hope it means that the intensity of the fighting will be very much reduced. That would give an opportunity for the population to get out safely and indeed there will not be heavy weapons used," Mr. Holmes said, wrapping up his visit. The Defence ministry said that Sri Lankan security forces will continue with their humanitarian operations aimed at rescuing the remaining 15,000 to 20,000 people held hostage by the LTTE, confined to a 5 sq.km strip of coastal land, despite Monday's decision. The Government said it will ensure the proper implementation of the Zero Civilian Casualty Policy, so far adopted by the Sri Lankan armed forces during their counter terror mission, a defence ministry official said. "It (announcement of not using heavy weapons) is a decision that signals the nearing victory of one of the world's most successful battles against terrorism. It is a decision that displays the genuine will of the Sri Lankan government to rescue its citizens from terrorism," he said. Mr. Holmes met President Mahinda Rajapaksa on Monday who apprised him about the relief and rehabilitation measures taken by his Government. Mr. Holmes, who returned from a visit to Vavuniya to see the facilities at the welfare villages set up to receive the large influx of civilians from the No Fire Zone, expressed his satisfaction over the facilities at the villages. Minister of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services Rishard Bathiyudeen also accompanied the UN envoy to visit the welfare camps. Courtesy: hinduonnet.com