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## Speedy resettlement for all Internally Displaced Persons - Dr. Kohona

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Rasika Somarathna The Government has explained to the two visiting foreign dignitaries from UK and France that it expects to resettle all displaced people from the North at the earliest possible, Foreign Secretary Dr. Palitha Kohona said.

Dr. Kohona told the media yesterday that the matter of resettlement and several other issues were discussed at length by visiting French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and UK Foreign Affairs Secretary of State David Miliband, in meetings with President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama and other officials. It was noted during the media briefing, where Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe and Secretary Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha also took part, that the resettlement process which has already begun would be expedited as soon as possible in line with the de-mining and rebuilding of infrastructure programs. Dr. Kohona, during the briefing, said that the successful resettlement program in the East, where around 95 per cent of IDPs had already got resettled in a very short span of time, was pointed out as an example. It was also brought to the notice of the two dignitaries that this was a unique achievement in comparison to other such global experiences, he added. With regard to the post conflict political agenda, it was explained that the Government was already in the process of enacting the 13th Amendment and discussions were taking place to go beyond the existing limits. In addition, elections have taken place in the East with North too lined up to follow suit. Thus it was explained that with the present efforts, a viable political mechanism would soon be in place in which all would be made to feel comfortable, he added. Dr. Kohona also said both NGOs and INGOs, which wish to get involved in IDP welfare and development of conflict affected areas, were most welcome to do so, if they came with specific programs and adequate funds to support the projects. However, organizations which come with no such prior plans or ones which have vested interests would not be allowed access, he added. Dr. Kohona said the Government had agreed to consider a request to allow more access to INGOs and NGOs in welfare camps and villages set up for the displaced. However, during meetings it was pointed out to these two officials that the Government had already allowed 18 U.N. and international NGOs into these welfare centres, he said. "We can facilitate others if the need arises," Dr. Kohona added. Addressing queries from the media, Dr. Kohona also admitted that some NGOs and INGOs were doing a very good job in helping IDPs which he described in his own words as 'fantastic'. Their work is appreciated and encouraged, he noted. In addition, these officials were explained that accessing the 'safe zone' was not feasible now owing to prevailing ground realities, he said. "Also we have explained that there is no proper screening process as soon as civilians enter the cleared areas where there is only a body check to identify possible suicide bombers with a proper screening only taking place at Omanthai, where the ICRC too is present," he added. Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe while appreciating the support of the international community noted that they would only play a complimentary role to that of the Government efforts when it came to rebuilding and rehabilitation efforts.

Courtesy: defence.lk