
Government Committed to Providing Food Assistance to Civilians in No-Fire Zone

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The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to supplying sufficient food to civilians held captive by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the no-fire zone on the Mullaitivu coast. The Government has since February facilitated the delivery of over 2,400 MT of food, medicines and other relief items to the no-fire zone.

The Government has expressed its appreciation to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Food Programme (WFP) and other partners for their assistance in supplying these items to the civilians. The WFP publicly acknowledged the Government's willingness to send in food and other supplies during the monthly Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance which was held under the Chairmanship of Mahinda Samarasinghe MP, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights on 11 (Monday) at the Ministry of Defence. The Government is disappointed that the ICRC has been unable to deliver foodstuffs and evacuate patients (sick and wounded) over three successive attempts during the week commencing 11 May. The ICRC was last able to deliver 25 MT of food and evacuate patients on 09 May. The Government and the Sri Lanka Navy facilitated the loading and departure of three consignments of food amounting to 550 MT during the past 4 days. The Government has clearly manifested its willingness to have these patients evacuated and the civilians supplied with basic food items by providing all guarantees and assurances and granting all security clearances necessary. The Government considers that these non-combatant civilians are deserving of every assistance until they are released by or liberated from the clutches of the LTTE. The Additional Government Agent, Mullaitivu, and the fishermen's association who have been cooperating in this effort have indicated their readiness to unload the vessels bearing food supplies. However the ICRC has communicated its inability to unload the food supplies due to what it deems are security conditions in the no-fire zone. It is hoped that the ICRC will be able to obtain the necessary guarantees from the LTTE similar to those obtained from the Government in order to enable the supply of essential food supplies to civilians unlawfully held captive. In addition, the Government will also explore all available avenues of getting these supplies to the civilians who require them. The Government and security forces are doing their utmost to ensure the liberation of these civilians at the earliest available opportunity so that they may be brought to safe areas and cared for until conditions are created for their eventual return to their original places of habitation. [Ends] Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights Colombo Sri Lanka. 15 May 2009