
Sri Lanka Easier To Reach The Hungry

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In recent days, it has become easier for WFP staff to monitor food distributions in the government-run camps housing people displaced by the last wave of fighting in Sri Lanka. Our country director, Adnan Khan, explains that WFP is now feeding 290,000 people in the camps. COLOMBO --The final stages of the long conflict between Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE Tamil Tiger rebel movement saw thousands of families flee their homes in the conflict-affected northern region. Most of these displaced people (IDPs) are now in temporary transit camps set up by the government. They are dependent on humanitarian aid.

As well as providing food for 290,000 people in the camps, WFP has also scaled up the delivery of fortified food to children and mothers to keep malnutrition at bay. We interviewed country director Adnan Khan to learn more. What is the state of the IDPs in the camps? AK: Most IDPs were clearly in bad shape when they arrived at the camps, some showing signs of dehydration and undernourishment, and visibly exhausted, traumatized and tired. But comprehensive assessments need to be done before we can ascertain the exact physical, emotional and psychological condition of the IDPs. What is the latest on access to the IDP camps? AK: Access has improved somewhat over the last few days. WFP staff can move inside the camps with vehicles. We continue to work with the government on this issue and hope that there will be more improvement in access in the coming days. Food supplies have never been affected by access restrictions. The restrictions on vehicles inside the camps affected our ability to do some of our monitoring work. We have to monitor our food distributions since we must be accountable to our governing bodies. How can WFP be sure that the IDPs are receiving food? AK: Although most vehicles are not allowed, our monitoring staff can walk into the camps, and WFP has set up a mobile storage unit in the largest IDP camp to ensure that food is close at hand. Trucks carrying food to the camps are also allowed in. We are undertaking communal cooking and getting feedback from our local NGO partners that food is being regularly received by the IDPs. This has also been observed and documented by our field staff on the ground. I've been to the camps myself, and seen the IDPs getting and eating food, and in two zones within the largest IDP camp at Menic Farm, some beneficiaries have recently been issued with individual ration cards so that they can receive food to prepare and cook their own meals. What are WFP's main concerns now? AK: One key concern right now is getting the resources we need. We urgently need more than US\$35 million to maintain food assistance to IDPs through to the end of the year. It takes up to 6 months to turn funding into meals for the IDPs, so we are asking donors to make pledges and confirm contributions without delay. How long do you think the IDPs will be in the camps? AK: WFP's assistance to the IDPs should continue until they regain their livelihood and earning capacities. Most of the displaced are farmers or dependent on agriculture. They have lost the last harvest, and they will probably lose the next harvest later this year because they would have been unable to work in their fields. The IDPs will probably resume their normal activities by the April / May 2010 cropping season and harvest. We anticipate that we'll be assisting the IDPs until at least, the middle of next year, because even after they leave the IDP camps, the IDPs will need food packages and other recovery and rehabilitation assistance until they are able to re-establish their livelihoods. Courtesy: wfp.org