
UK to help SL Govt. with de-mining

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The British High Commission announced yesterday that the UK would support the de-mining of the North and help to remove thousands of mines and unexploded bombs left after decades of fighting. The High Commission yesterday handed over a £500,000 Mines Advisory Group (MAG) grant to help survey minefields and pinpoint unexploded ordnance so that they could be safely disposed of.

MAG Country Programme Manager Llewelyn Jones said MAG would work closely with the Sri Lankan government in carrying out the mine clearing programme and ensure that the IDPs could go back to their homes soon. Mines were widely used during the conflict, and are scattered across many areas in the North and East of the country. With funding from the Department for International Development (DFID), MAG will rapidly be able to help clear the villages, roads and agricultural land in the North which were worst affected by the conflict, and allow civilians to return to their villages and livelihoods. UK funding will help many of the 280,000 displaced civilians still living in camps to return home as quickly and safely as possible. This contribution is the first stage of DFID's three-part early recovery strategy, and will enable civilians to return to land which is declared free of land mines and unexploded ordnance. According to the High Commission, this funding will specifically support the Government of Sri Lanka's plan to return a majority of the IDPs to their home areas within 180 days. MAG mine detection experts will quickly identify areas free of mine contamination and declare them safe for civilian return. In lightly contaminated areas armoured excavators will be used to clear rapidly any mines or unexploded ordnance. The remaining heavily mined areas will be clearly demarcated so that no one can enter them by accident. These areas can be returned to at a later date to complete the mine clearance work. MAG is one of the first organisations to be allowed access to the northern conflict zones since the fighting stopped. British International Development Minister Mike Foster said mines and unexploded munitions posed a deadly threat to any civilian trying to return home and rebuild their lives. "The safe return of civilians would not be possible without the work of agencies like MAG. After 26 years of conflict, removing the threat of land mines and deadly unexploded bombs is a start on the long road to normality," he said. The UK has also promised to support in helping the IDPs to recover themselves and rebuild their livelihoods. "As soon as an area is cleared of mines, the UK stands ready to help civilians travel back home and start to recover their lives and livelihoods," said Mr. Foster. Courtesy: dailymirror.lk