
Senior UNDP official appreciates resettlement efforts of Sri Lanka Government

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Peace benefits must be strengthened through economic measures and inclusive reconstruction efforts, says UN Assistant Secretary General Colombo, November 13, 2009. "We appreciate the efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka, in the past few weeks, to accelerate the release and return of IDPs and as agreed with the Secretary General in May, to resettle a majority of the IDPs by January 2010," said Mr. Ajay Chhibber, UN Assistant Secretary General (ASG) and Assistant Administrator for UNDP, while on a three day mission to Sri Lanka, which concluded today. The visit, which included a trip to the IDP Welfare Centre in Menik Farm and the "Rice Bowl" in Mannar District, served to update Mr. Chhibber on the recovery needs in Sri Lanka brought on by recent resettlement trends. In Vavuniya, Mr. Chhibber held discussions with the IDPs, civil and military authorities, officials in the District Mine Action Office (DMAO) and demining operators. The discussion provided an opportunity to see how UNDP could best contribute to the post-resettlement process in view of the magnitude of the displacement and capacity challenges at hand. The ASG visited project sites in Vavuniya where UNDP is providing civil and legal documentation support to the IDPs. In addition, UNDP is also involved in strengthening disaster risk preparedness and environmental protection by supporting construction of drainage networks and reforestation initiatives. In Colombo, Mr. Chhibber met with senior Government officials and Ministers, including Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights and Hon. M.P. Basil Rajapaksa, Senior Presidential Advisor and the Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Dr. P.B. Jayasundera. Mr. Chhibber also held exchanges with representatives of the donor community in Sri Lanka and the United Nations Country Team. The visit provided Mr. Chhibber with the opportunity to outline UNDP's role in the recovery efforts in the coming weeks and months. UNDP, he said, is already playing an active role in assisting people in the camps and is an important partner of the Government. However, with the increase in the pace of resettlement, UNDP needs to start looking beyond the immediate resettlement process. Considerable assistance will be required to help communities establish sustainable livelihoods and restart their lives. UNDP in partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka, other UN agencies and bi-lateral donors, is in a strong position to contribute to post-resettlement efforts. "With the improving economic situation, Sri Lanka is already seeing some of the benefits of peace. This must be strengthened and consolidated through economic measures and an inclusive reconstruction effort in the North", he concluded.