
Sir John Holmes, visiting Sri Lanka is under “more positive circumstances”

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The UN Under-Secretary -General for Humanitarian Affairs, Sir John Holmes, who is on an official visit to Sri Lanka from 17th to 19th November 2009 called on Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on 18th November 2009 at the Ministry.

During the discussions, Foreign Minister Bogollagama outlined the resettlement process and demining activities which had taken place so far and highlighted the fact that the number of IDPs was declining on a daily basis due to the rapid pace of the resettlement process. Foreign Minister Bogollagama requested Sir John Holmes to consider providing more assistance in the areas of demining, infrastructure development and livelihood enhancement for the IDPs who were recently resettled and added that there was room for further movement out of the welfare villages in the coming days. Responding to Foreign Minister Bogollagama, Sir John Holmes, who is in Sri Lanka on the invitation of the Foreign Minister, stated that he was pleased to be in Sri Lanka again under “more positive circumstances”. The UN Under -Secretary- General for Humanitarian Affairs also stated that he was “encouraged” by the fact that people were “adjusting to peace”. Sir John Holmes, who had, on 17th November visited Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar and areas related to the IDPs including resettlement sites and locations where de-mining is taking place, appraised the Foreign Minister of the progress that he was able to observe since his previous visit. During the discussions, Foreign Minister Bogollagama also explained the various measures taken by the Government to provide health care for those remaining in the welfare villages. He stated that over 1000 health care workers were still working in and around the welfare villages to attend to the needs of the remaining IDPs. The Foreign Minister also stated that the Government of Sri Lanka was paying special attention to the rehabilitation of ex-combatants and former child soldiers and that the efforts being taken to assist their gradual reintegration into society. Mr. Suhada Gamalath, Secretary, Ministry of Justice and Law Reforms elaborated on the legal process that was being followed in terms of the ex-combatants and former child soldiers. He said measures were underway to enhance their livelihood opportunities for the future. Sir John Holmes also referred to the process of reconciliation and stated that it was an important opportunity for reconciliation in the post-conflict phase. The Secretary, Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, Mr. U.L.M. Haldeen, Mr. Mohan Peiris, PC the Attorney General , Mr Romesh Jayasinghe, Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Senior Officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the UN Resident Representative Mr. Neil Buhne and Officials from the UN Country Team were also present during the discussions. Sir John Holmes is also due to call on H.E. President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights, Hon. Basil Rajapaksa, Senior Advisor to the President and Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order on 19th November 2009. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Colombo

18th November 2009