



1 family torn apart by war
is too many

PRESS RELEASE

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Ministry of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs and UNHCR welcome Sri Lankan refugee returnees from India

Sixty-five Sri Lankan refugees today returned from India, bringing the total number of returns through UNHCR's facilitated repatriation programme to 147 so far this year. Among these returnees are some who have been living in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu, India, for more than two decades.

UNHCR Representative Golam Abbas, together with UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Igor Ivancic, was present at the Bandaranayake International Airport to welcome the returnees, along with the Honourable Minister D. M. Swaminathan and Mrs. N. R. Ranjini, the Secretary of the Ministry of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs, among other government officials.

“UNHCR is encouraged by the positive outlook of the Government of Sri Lanka towards the refugee returnees and is ready to extend our fullest cooperation in addressing refugee returnee related matters,” said Abbas.

UNHCR staff meets refugee returnees at the airport and facilitates their immigration, security and customs formalities. In addition, UNHCR in cooperation with the Bank of Ceylon deposits a reintegration grant and monetized NFI assistance intended for initial reintegration, such as purchasing household goods or repairing damaged housing, etc. on returnees' newly opened bank accounts. All returning refugees are also provided with a transport grant to help them to travel from the airport to their areas of origin in dignity. Once settled, returnees are advised to register with the UNHCR field offices for monitoring and referral purposes. UNHCR refers persons with special needs (e.g. persons with disabilities and elderly persons) to specialized institutions. Similarly, UNHCR refers those in need of legal counselling, civil documentation support, livelihood and education assistance to the relevant government authorities or other organizations that can provide targeted assistance.

UNHCR have assisted more than 92,000 Sri Lankan refugee returnees since the inception of its voluntary repatriation programme in 1987.

Thus far most refugees have been returning to the Northern District of Mannar, followed by, Vavuniya, and Jaffna in the Northern Province and Trincomalee District in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. A few are also returning to the Kilinochchi, Mullaittivu, Colombo, Batticaloa, Kandy, Ampara and Puttalam areas.



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UNHCR statistics, gathered from governments, show that as of mid-2013 there are near 123,000 Sri Lankan refugees in 46 countries. In 2014, as per the data shared by India, there are approximately 68,000 persons living in refugee camps and near 37,000 living outside the camps within India.

Sri Lankan refugees abroad who wish to return home can approach the closest UNHCR office in their country of asylum for necessary information and assistance.

UNHCR's Abbas noted, "We look forward to the resumption of the ferry service between India and Sri Lanka that would be of enormous support to those who wish to return."

End.

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