



**Joint Press Release by Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation,
Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs and the office of the
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

The government of Sri Lanka and UNHCR welcomes Sri Lankan refugee returnees from Tamil Nadu, India.

Colombo, Sri Lanka. September 13 -- 90 individuals of 35 families who fled to Tamil Nadu, India during the conflict period arrived in Sri Lanka today (13 September 2016) through the voluntary repatriation programme facilitated by the UN Refugee Agency.

The refugee returnees, who arrived at the Bandaranaike International Airport today, were welcomed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, Mr. V. Sivagnanasothy and the UNHCR Representative in Sri Lanka, Ms. Rianawati. The Secretary of the Ministry while welcoming refugee returnees to their homeland engaged in a discussion providing refugee returnees with an opportunity to share their views and impressions.

The Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs has implemented housing projects and livelihood assistance programmes in the areas of return for which the refugee returnees are, as of recently, also eligible to apply if they fulfil the prescribed criteria, in order to rebuild their lives in their homeland.

UNHCR assists refugee returnees by supporting their air travel and helps them to complete immigration, security and customs formalities. In addition, UNHCR assists with the opening of bank accounts for the returnees via Bank of Ceylon and provides a reintegration grant and monetized non-food assistance intended for purchasing basic household goods, etc. All returning refugees are also provided with a modest transport grant to help them travel from the airport to their home communities in dignity. Once settled, returnees are requested to register with the UNHCR field office for protection monitoring. UNHCR refers those in need of legal counselling, livelihood and education assistance to the relevant government authorities or other organizations that can provide targeted assistance.

As of today, the total number of refugee returnees arriving in Sri Lanka through the UNHCR facilitated voluntary repatriation programme in 2016 stands at 506 individuals, indicating a continued upward trend since 2014.

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