



United Nations
Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator
Colombo, Sri Lanka

8 April, 2010

Dear Mr Divaratne,

UN Support to Northern Resettlement

Reference is made to your letter addressed to Zola Dowell of 9 March. I have read the letter very carefully and taken note of the points raised there in. I wish to hereby provide clarifications on the issues highlighted in your letter, including some possible misunderstanding on the role of the UN, particularly UNOCHA, in support of the Government efforts for Northern Resettlement; and on some mistaken representations of such work, including with respect to the management and effectiveness of international aid.

First of all, I would like to reiterate the fact that we accept fully Government leadership in provision and coordination of aid. Under the leadership of the Government and in close partnership with UN agencies and other partners including NGOs, the "humanitarian catastrophe" predicted by some quarters when almost 300,000 people escaped from the Vanni between January and May 2009 was averted. Despite many challenges, this work was effective in helping people to recover their strength and has led to the re-settlement/return of the bulk of the internally displaced, with the Government providing key support in the re-establishment of government services, and UN agencies working in close partnership with Government to help people return, have shelter, basic rations, strengthen public services, and begin their livelihoods, among many other things.

Two statistics reflect well the basic effectiveness of this government led effort to assist them, a nutrition survey of children in the Menik Farm camps in May 2009 found levels of acute malnutrition of 35%. By December the level was 13.5% which is comparable to the national average. Another is the increasing progress and strong partnership on demining, spurred by the Government's own commitment of resources to purchase specialized demining equipment and subsequently assisted by UNHCR and UNOCHA resources approved by John Holmes. In both of these cases strong leadership by Government and a productive partnership with the UN and NGOs has helped thousands of children to regain their strength, and now to return to their home areas. I could cite many other examples as well.

As discussed in our most recent meeting, the UN and humanitarian country team in Sri Lanka remain committed to supporting the ongoing efforts by the Sri Lankan Government to return people displaced during the final phase of the conflict to their homes in the Northern Province in dignity and safety and to assist them to re-build their lives and their communities. By all accounts I receive, and from my personal experience in visiting return areas last week, there is an increasingly productive collaboration as UN agencies work with local civilian and military authorities, and under the leadership of the Presidential Task Force, to achieve this goal.

Mr S B Divaratne
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We respect the Government decision not to endorse the Appeal for funds through the Common Humanitarian Action Plan though we believe it is a lost opportunity to benefit from much good work done together over the last months with you and your colleagues in government in preparing the document, to raise much needed funds for our shared objective of assisting ongoing programmes in the IDP sites, and to support the returns. Nevertheless, we are advocating strongly that additional international resources be made available for these two needs as a priority, as well as for funds to help support the re-establishment of local government structures, strengthen communities and provide new livelihoods. Both myself, and United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, have personally advocated with a number of donors, the need to help fill these gaps. We are also doing our best to access other UN funds that may be available, and have recently obtained \$13.7 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (for which John Holmes is responsible internationally and myself locally) to permit UN agencies to continue with ongoing programmes agreed with Government in support of the return of IDPs, which otherwise had been or were in danger of being interrupted because of insufficient funds from donors. This is the same fund which recently helped finance the purchase of specialized demining equipment (e.g. flails and detectors) made available directly to the Government. However a combination of fiscal pressures in many donor countries, and resources needed to respond to the disaster in Haiti, means international funding is increasingly hard to mobilize - hence our advocacy for a document such as the CHAP 2010 to help donors focus on needs here.

Under the overall coordination of the Presidential Task Force nationally and the Government Agents at the district level, I have worked, in my role as Humanitarian Coordinator, to help meet the humanitarian needs of the IDPs. The objective of this work is to support the most effective response to the needs of the people by ensuring that the UN and its partners work well as a team. This work supports, and does not supplant, the overall responsibility of the Government as the coordinator of the relief and development effort. In this work I have been ably supported through the efforts of colleagues from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - an office which is headed internationally by John Holmes, on the basis of the mandate given by UN member states in General Assembly Resolution 46/182 - whose resources and expertise are available to support Government's overall coordination and timely response to the needs of vulnerable populations. In this regard, we stand ready to assist the new Government led coordination mechanism, as we have in the past with the CCHA and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, and to support Government's efforts to mobilize resources.

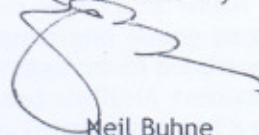
With regard to the implementation of activities, as a UN team, we feel that we should, and we have worked closely with Government structures both at the national and district levels. Similarly each UN activity falls under various agency agreements with the Sri Lankan Government with monitoring mechanisms in place agreed with the Government, in addition to our internal monitoring mechanisms through which we are responsible for our member states. We take note of your concerns regarding the monitoring and evaluation of international assistance and stand ready to help build capacities to do this in Government, as well as to strengthen the reporting of UN agencies on their work. As you may be aware, the Financial Tracking System established by UNOCHA provides details of financial contributions for humanitarian assistance coming to Sri Lanka by donor, by agency and by programme and is available to the Government.

We have worked to plan and implement activities effectively and in close cooperation. This cooperation occurred at different levels. At the senior level, John Holmes visited Sri Lanka four times in 2009 and each visit was positively received by the Government. I, personally met regularly, sometimes many times in a day, with government counterparts, whether at senior levels, or in the offices of Government agents or divisional secretaries; and I know that my colleagues working in districts have had intensive and productive collaboration. We recognize fully that we are working in support of national programmes and have made all efforts to implement our programmes in partnership with or through government agencies - a good example being the distribution of WFP food which is done in close partnership with the Ministry of Nation Building, local government and in most cases multi-purpose cooperative societies.

As we work with the Government to provide humanitarian assistance, we are simultaneously supporting recovery and development programmes. In this context, the humanitarian assistance will reduce as early recovery and increasingly development programmes take hold.

In the coming months, we look forward to more cooperation with the Sri Lankan Government to strengthen services in aid of families and communities returning to their homes and villages. We are grateful for having received many of the district plans just as they were cleared. We look forward to working with the Presidential Task Force and the respective Government Agents towards the implementation of such plans, and to continued interaction with you and your colleagues on the Presidential Task Force.

Yours sincerely



Neil Buhne

UN Resident & Humanitarian Co-ordinator

c.c. Hon Basil Rajapakse, Senior Advisor to the President and Chairman, Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province
Hon Mr Mahinda Samarsinghe, Minister of Disaster Management & Human Rights