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COUNTING THE HUMAN COST OF SRI LANKA'S CONFLICT

11 September 2009

The Government of Sri Lanka announced a plan on 23 May to resettle most civilians displaced by conflict by the end of the year. The government's target of 80% was later revised downward to 60%.

The 180-day process was to include both people newly displaced by fighting in the north, as well as people who had been displaced for extended periods of time.

Some Sri Lankan families have been displaced for years or decades and the process of resettling them has been ongoing. Minister of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services Rishad Bathiudeen told Sri Lanka's Parliament in August that the Government had re-settled more 59,000 war-displaced families in recent months, mainly victims of earlier displacements in the east.

According to UN relief statistics, as of 28 August, 266,567 people displaced by conflict in the north after 1 April 2009 remained in camps and hospitals. This is down from about 280,000 in June. Almost 250,000 of them were in Vavuniya district.

The Government's plan to return people to their places of origin has four phases, with families from eastern Sri Lanka and Jaffna returned first, followed by Vavuniya, Mannar and finally from the former LTTE strongholds of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. The Office of the President is responsible for coordinating this plan.

By the end of August, 6,490 people were reported to have been released from camps to stay with host families or in elders' homes by the end of August. The majority of these people were elderly or disabled. 5,123 people were returned to Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara districts between 5 August and 28 August.

On 26 August, some 800 Hindu and Catholic priests were released from camps for displaced people in Vavuniya. On 20 August, 130 people displaced in 2006 were moved from sites in Batticaloa District to Trincomalee District, but they were unable to return home because their land is within a military-designated High Security Zone. They have been accommodated in a school and another public building.

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Unlock the camps in Sri Lanka video

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Menik Farm camp for internally displaced persons, Sri Lanka, August 2009

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