

PRESS RELEASE

Crisis in Sri Lanka: UNICEF airlifts 50 tonnes of emergency supplies as numbers in urgent need swell

Colombo, 27 April 2009 – UNICEF said that 50 metric tonnes of airlifted emergency relief supplies landed today in Colombo. The supplies will immediately be sent to northern Sri Lanka to meet some of the most urgent needs of more than 100,000 people who have fled fierce fighting over the past week.

The emergency airlift includes nutritional supplies, water treatment units for safe water, oral rehydration salts, and medical supplies. An additional airlift will follow on Tuesday.

“Sri Lanka is facing a humanitarian crisis that requires a rapid response,” said UNICEF’s Representative in Sri Lanka, Mr Philippe Duamelle. “We estimate that there are approximately a quarter of a million people who need help and they need it quickly.”

Last week UNICEF sent 50 metric tonnes of high energy biscuits for those who had just escaped fierce fighting. This is on top of the more than 130 metric tonnes of nutritional supplements that have been provided to treat malnutrition over the last weeks.

In this time UNICEF has also provided tens of thousands of hygiene kits, hundreds of water tanks and latrines, supported the construction of an emergency paediatric and emergency maternity ward at the Vavuniya General hospital, along with distributing education kits for children.

Calling the situation in the north a catastrophe for children, UNICEF said that tens of thousands of civilians – including a large number of children – are still trapped in the North. In addition to being caught in the crossfire, they also desperately lack food, water and basic medical supplies such as anesthetic and antibiotics.

People who have escaped the conflict are arriving in often overcrowded camps exhausted, hungry, and in many cases wounded or sick and malnourished.

UNICEF said it was in urgent need of US\$5 million to help meet their most immediate needs in health, nutrition, water, sanitation, protection and education,

For further information, please contact:

James Elder, Communication Chief, UNICEF Sri Lanka, Mobile: 94-777416742, Office: 94-11-2555270 ext 250 jelder@unicef.org

Sarah Crowe, Regional Chief of Communications, UNICEF South Asia
Mobile: +91 9910532314. Office: +91 1124606247 scrowe@unicef.org