

Sri Lanka: tens of thousands still trapped in shrinking combat zone, UN says
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More than 60,000 civilians have fled the combat zone in Sri Lanka in the past two months
22 April 2009 The United Nations voiced deep concern today over the safety of tens of thousands of civilians trapped in a shrinking pocket of land on Sri Lankas north-east coast where fighting rages between the military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The situation in the area is chaotic and reliable information is difficult to obtain, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

According to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense, over 60,000 civilians fled the area since 20 April, with nearly 83,000 leaving between October 2008 and April 2009. More than 81,000 are now accommodated in camps.

While there are no verifiable numbers of overall casualties, we believe that significant numbers have been killed and injured in the military operation, UN spokesperson Marie Okabe told reporters. Delivering aid to those trapped in the combat area remained shipment remains difficult as well. Some 1,200 metric tonnes of humanitarian assistance, which was due to embark for the area on 19 April could not leave due to the fighting, according to OCHA. No assistance has been delivered to the conflict area since 1 April.

In addition, available stocks of non-food items to internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have fled to the Vavuniya district will soon be exhausted because of the large influx of new arrivals. In response to influx, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) said today that it was providing some 25,000 hygiene packs for women and girls to meet the needs of the large number of IDPs. ()

Along with other UN agencies and humanitarian organizations, UNFPA voiced deep concern over the plight of tens of thousands of civilians unable to flee the fighting. Women and girls have unique needs, said agency representative Lene K. Christiansen. UNFPA is working with government and non-governmental partners to ensure that these needs are not overlooked in the current crisis.

Source: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30561&Cr=sri+lanka&Cr1=>