



United Nations

The United Nations (UN) was established on 24 October 1945 by the common agreement of countries in the pursuit of permanent peace. Today, 192 countries belong to the UN.

When states become members of the United Nations, they agree to accept the obligations of the UN Charter, an international treaty that sets out basic principles of relations between countries. The UN has four main purposes according to the Charter: to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate on international problems and the promotion of human rights; and to harmonize the actions of nations.

The UN includes the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, the office of the Secretary General, and more than 30 specialized programmes, funds and agencies addressing almost every aspect of life on earth. The UN is central to practical global efforts to solve the great problems of our time.

The United Nations in Sri Lanka

In 1952 Sri Lanka became one of the first countries in the world to have UN development assistance. Three years later, on 14 December 1955, Sri Lanka was admitted as a member state of the United Nations.

Over many years the UN has cultivated a broad and wide ranging partnership – with the government, civil society, the broad NGO community, bilateral donors, and international financial institutions – to address a multitude of challenges, both in long term development, and during times of emergency.

Today, Sri Lanka has made impressive achievements towards key areas of human development like education and health, despite severe setbacks such as the tsunami and long years of conflict. However while the country is now considered a middle-income country, significant challenges remain. These include income inequality and access to essential services in different districts; poverty and malnutrition; and the reconstruction of the country now the war has ended.



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United Nations in Sri Lanka

helping people to live better lives



Development work

– providing livelihood opportunities

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is an agreement between the UN and the Government of Sri Lanka for development activities over the next five years (2008-2012). With a projected budget of USD 370 million, it focuses on four areas:

- Poverty reduction
- Improved governance and democracy
- The consolidation of peace
- Equal opportunities for women and men

The UNDAF is anchored in the Millennium Development Goals, a series of development targets set by the UN member states – including Sri Lanka - in 2000. It includes the government's own priorities, as well as internationally agreed treaty obligations and development goals, and was developed in consultation with Sri Lanka's private sector and civil society organizations. The UN's activities combine policy development with a range of hands-on support and services to help local institutions implement those policies. The UNDAF also integrates the activities of all the diverse UN agencies working on the ground in Sri Lanka (see the list below). The ultimate aim is to ensure that all Sri Lankans, and especially the most vulnerable, benefit from development.



Humanitarian work

– mitigating tragedy, building self-sufficiency

Tsunami assistance

At the request of the Sri Lankan government, the UN assisted over 800,000 affected people at a cost of USD 550 million. This diverse work included the distribution of food and medicines, psychosocial support and environmental remediation.

Later, the UN focused on getting people back to their homes, helped people get back to work, and rebuilt basic community infrastructure like schools and hospitals. It has played a major role in preparing the country for any future disasters.

Mitigating the effect of the conflict on people

In the past few years, the UN has used the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) to combine international donors, the government, non-governmental organizations, and a whole range of other stakeholders in support of an estimated 400,000 people affected by fighting and attacks. Hundreds of millions of dollars were donated to Sri Lanka to help mitigate the worst effects of the conflict. The UN will assist with the reconstruction of Sri Lanka in the years to come by working with Government to help people recover, and to help raise resources for this work.

The UN agencies and funds

– the impact on ordinary Sri Lankans

UN agencies provide a wide range of specialized assistance to the government and people of Sri Lanka based on mandates laid down in UN Conventions and International Treaties. The UN Country Team in Sri Lanka is composed of 15 resident agencies making a real difference to millions of Sri Lankans each year.



FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) helps Sri Lankans to improve their food production capacity, food security and livelihoods through agricultural development assistance, improved fisheries management and livestock improvement programmes.

ILO (International Labour Organization) provides technical assistance to government, employers, trade union bodies and civil society organizations to improve employment policies. Its work supports around 300,000 Sri Lankans with livelihood and decent work opportunities, particularly youth and vulnerable groups

IOM (International Organization for Migration) works to ensure the orderly and humane management of migration and provides humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and IDPs.

OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) coordinates humanitarian activities to make sure

thousands of people affected by disasters in Sri Lanka receive assistance. It advocates for the rights of people in need.

UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the UN family, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UN system to support universal access for prevention, treatment, care and support for the national response to AIDS.

UNDP (UN Development Programme) has a nationwide impact through a wide range of development projects that build the capacity of counterparts at the national, regional and local levels. Its transition programme has supported around 180,000 people.

UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) works with the government and non-governmental partners to improve access and availability of quality reproductive health services for men, women and young people, and in empowering women to be free from violence and discrimination.

UN-HABITAT (UN Human Settlements Programme) helped to rebuild 9,655 houses benefiting over 48,000 tsunami victims. It helps poor families to improve their housing through the Credit Enhancement Guarantee fund, and contributes to policy initiatives in housing, urban development, slum upgrading and climate change.

UNHCR (UN Refugee agency) works with over 500,000 people displaced within Sri Lanka as well as those returning home. UNHCR also assists Sri Lankan refugees returning from India and a small number of refugees and asylum seekers from other countries.

UNIC (UN Information Centre) Colombo, established in 1961 is the information arm for the entire UN system in Sri Lanka. It serves as the central point for dissemination of information on the UN system with the aim of promoting and achieving UN ideals and objectives.

UNICEF (UN Children's Fund) reaches an estimated 1 in 4 Sri Lankan women and children throughout the island with its education, health, child protection, water and sanitation and nutrition programmes.

UNDSS (Security) is responsible for the safety of UN staff country-wide.

UNOPS (UN Office for Project Services) helps the tsunami and post

conflict reconstruction effort of the government by rebuilding critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, health clinics, schools, water supply systems and harbors.

UNV (UN Volunteers) has despatched hundreds of volunteer specialists all over Sri Lanka including mobilising volunteerism for development to assist in a range of UN and partner programmes.

WFP (World Food Programme) provides food assistance to over one million Sri Lankans, including school children, pregnant/nursing mothers, infants and people affected by the conflict.

WHO (World Health Organization) assists the health needs of Sri Lankans covering communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health, emergency preparedness and response, maternal and child health, through strengthening of the health systems and improving the quality of health care.

World Bank assistance has helped to develop Sri Lanka's energy, transport, and telecommunication infrastructure, expanded health, education, water and sanitation services, enhanced agricultural productivity and financed nascent private enterprise.

