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United States Contributing \$6 Million to Support Demining in Northern Sri Lanka

Colombo, August 19, 2009: The U.S. Government is contributing an additional \$6 million for demining activities in Sri Lanka's Northern Province to help people displaced by the conflict return to their homes as quickly as possible.

This funding, through the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political and Military Affairs Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (State/PMWRA), was granted to four non-governmental organizations (NGOs) currently working on demining activities in Sri Lanka. This additional funding is allowing the demining NGOs to increase their demining capacity and expand their work over the next twelve months. The demining process includes initial assessments of the land where mines may have been planted, technical surveys of minefields, clearing of mines and the destruction of unexploded ordinance.

DDG (Danish De-Mining Group), FSD (Swiss Foundation for Mine Action), Halo Trust and MAG (Mines Advisory Group) are sharing the award and using the funds to hire additional staff for survey teams and demining teams and to purchase new equipment to remove the mines.

“The U.S. Government is pleased to provide this funding and assist with demining in northern Sri Lanka,” stated James R. Moore, U.S. Charge d’Affaires. “Demining is a critical step in the process so that people can return to their homes, and we support the Government of Sri Lanka’s commitment to return all those displaced quickly and safely,” he continued.

In addition to this new funding, the Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) team, a group of U.S. military and civilian demining experts from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Pacific Command, Special Operations Command Pacific, and U.S. Army Pacific visited Sri Lanka on June 22-26. The team met with a number of Sri Lankan government officials, members of the Sri Lankan military and representatives from non governmental organizations involved with demining to identify how the United States can best assist the Sri Lankan military in its humanitarian demining efforts in northern Sri Lanka. The U.S. military, through U.S. Pacific Command, will provide equipment and training to the Sri Lanka Army for humanitarian demining in the Northern Province.

The U.S. Government has provided more than \$68 million for humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka in 2008 and 2009, including more than \$42 million in emergency food aid and more than \$11 million in emergency non-food relief. Most of this assistance has been directed to serve Sri Lankans displaced by the conflict in the North.

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