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UNHCR helps light up return areas in Sri Lanka's north

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka – The UN Refugee Agency yesterday donated a consignment of solar lamps to help light up some of the most remote areas in the northern district of Jaffna.

The consignment was handed over by UNHCR to Jaffna local government officials at a short ceremony on Monday. The solar lamps will be set up in six locations in Jaffna's Vadamarachchi East division which are currently not connected to the national electricity grid.

"Our assessments show that these returnee families face many difficulties because of lack of light," says UNHCR's Representative Michael Zwack. "Women are afraid to go out at night or to use sanitation facilities and children can't study in the evening. We hope the solar lamps will go some way to improving this situation."

The solar lamps systems will be installed in a pre-school or common hall in each of the six locations. This will allow the communities including teachers and students to either work longer hours or meet in the evenings for recreational activities. UNHCR will train the technical teams responsible for the maintenance of the lamps.

Families from Vadamarachchi East, who have suffered multiple displacements since the 1990's and were also hit by the 2004 tsunami, have been gradually returning to the area since it was opened in September 2010. Many areas are yet to be connected to the national power grid and are situated in the midst of thick jungle, far away from the nearest towns.

This is the third batch of solar lamps UNHCR has donated to help light up Vadamarachchi East. The agency made similar donations in June and July this year and will continue to support renewable energy projects in return areas.

ENDS

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