



Immigration and
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RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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27 September 2010

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Sri Lanka: Information on the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), including on the relationship between the EPDP and the Sri Lankan Army, whether they mistreat Tamil populations in the north or in Colombo; if so, whether they extort Tamils
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Formed in 1987, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) initially fought alongside the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but later allied itself with government military forces to fight against the LTTE (Human Rights Watch 5 Mar. 2008, 55-56). The EPDP is part of the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (TamilNet 3 May 2010; *Political Handbook* 2009, 1261). An Associate Professor of Political Science at Wake Forest University in the United States (US), stated in 22 September 2010 correspondence:

Besides being a political party, the EPDP also operated as a paramilitary outfit during the war. Its attitude in this regard has changed little despite the war having ended over a year ago. Consequently, the EPDP is closely associated with the military and/or police. The EPDP operates with impunity.

The Country of Origin Information Report on Sri Lanka produced by the United Kingdom (UK) Border Agency cites a 12 January 2010 letter from the British High Commission in Colombo, which states that, according to some humanitarian groups, "the most visible, intimidating and powerful" paramilitary group in Sri Lanka is the EPDP (UK 18 Feb. 2010, No. 10.05). The letter further states:

This paramilitary party, aligned with the government, operated with impunity and often with the military, openly carrying weapons. They were known to stand in the roads forcing people to buy their newsletters. (ibid.)

The United States' Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009* states that individuals suspected of being associated with paramilitary groups, including the EPDP in Jaffna, were reported to have assisted government military forces in "numerous killings and assaults of civilians" (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 1). According to Human Rights Watch, the EPDP "closely cooperate[s]" with Sri Lankan security forces (5 Mar. 2008, 50). The security forces use the EPDP to identify and apprehend individuals suspected of supporting or fighting for the LTTE, in particular because the EPDP is composed of native-Tamil speakers (Human Rights Watch 5 Mar. 2008). Similarly, the Associate Professor of Political Science stated that "[i]n the North especially, the army uses the EPDP to learn what is happening in the Tamil community" (22 Sept. 2010, 50). However, Human Rights Watch also indicates that sometimes the EPDP seems to act independently, but with the Sri Lankan security forces "turning a blind eye" (5 Mar. 2008, 51).

Country Reports 2009 states that 50 Tamil-speaking police officers have been hired to work in Jaffna, but also notes that observers are concerned these individuals were formerly members of Tamil paramilitary groups (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 1).

Human Rights Watch indicates that there is "significant evidence" that "pro-government Tamil armed groups," working alone or with members of the security forces, are involved in "enforced disappearances" (5 Mar. 2008, 50). Evidence suggests that EPDP members were involved in disappearances in the Jaffna peninsula (Human Rights Watch 5 Mar. 2008, 50). Similarly, the Associate Professor stated that the EPDP is associated with "enforced disappearances" of Tamil individuals (22 Sept. 2010). According to the Associate Professor, those taken could be LTTE sympathizers or anyone the EPDP considers to be a rival (22 Sept. 2010).

Similarly, a 3 May 2010 TamilNet article published by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse as saying that armed members of the EPDP have engaged in extortion, abduction, killing for ransom and other "social crimes" in the Jaffna peninsula. The article states that extortion is allegedly conducted by armed EPDP members working in collaboration with the police (TamilNet 3 May 2010).

An April 2009 report produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that the EPDP has been implicated in "extensive and serious violations of human rights including extortion, detention, torture, disappearances and extra-judicial killings" (UN Apr. 2009, 7). The same source indicates that these human rights violations have taken place in the North and that the EPDP has acted with "impunity" (ibid.).

The Associate Professor stated that extortion by the EPDP especially takes place in Jaffna and Colombo (22 Sept. 2010). He said that the EPDP extorts money from business owners in particular, as well as from truckers and fishermen (Associate Professor 22 Sept. 2010). This money is akin to "protection money," according to the Associate Professor (ibid.). He further stated:

Extortion starts in a polite way, with the extorter stating that the money is needed for charitable purposes, or as a "contribution to the party" even though it is well known by all involved in the transaction that this is not the case. Typically, no one shows up with a gun and threatens an individual. If, however, the person is adamant about not paying, then they will receive another visit. This visit would contain veiled threats (e.g., mentioning where the children go to school...). If an individual still refuses, the individual will have to be willing to suffer the consequences. The individual who refuses to pay will be beaten up or killed. The EPDP will make an example of someone who does not pay. (Associate Professor 22 Sept. 2010)

The Associate Professor stated that "there is hardly any law and order in Sri Lanka" for those who lack connections to the police, military or anyone else in a position of power (ibid.). According to the Associate Professor, going to the police to complain of extortion is ineffective, "especially" if the individual making the complaint is a Tamil (ibid.).

In contrast, the aforementioned letter from the British High Commission in Colombo cites a representative from the Sri Lankan police as saying that paramilitary groups do not operate in Jaffna (UK 18 Feb. 2010, No. 10.05). The letter also reports a Sri Lankan government agent as indicating that paramilitary groups are no longer a "serious problem" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response

is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Academics with relevant expertise from San Francisco State University, Simon Fraser University, University of Edinburgh, University of London, and University of Oslo were unable to provide information, as were representatives from Amnesty International (AI), the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), International Crisis Group, Law & Society Trust (LST), University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna (UTHR [J]).

Publications, including: *Asian Survey, Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, Contemporary South Asia, Current History, The Economist, Far Eastern Economic Review, Human Rights Quarterly, International Security, Jane's Intelligence Review, The Journal of Asian Studies (JAS), Journal of Refugee Studies, The Lancet, International Third World Quarterly (YWQ), South Asian Survey, Refugee Survey Quarterly.*

Internet sites, including: Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), Centre for Research on Inequality (CRISE), Human Security and Ethnicity, *The Colombo Times, Daily News*, GlobalSecurity.org, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), International Crisis Group, The Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka, TamilNet.

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