

Immigration and
Refugee Board of CanadaCommission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Canada

[Home](#) > [Research](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

12 August 2009

LKA103192.E

Sri Lanka: Situation in northern Sri Lanka since the government defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to the International Crisis Group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) released an official statement on 17 May 2009 acknowledging that the civil war had ended, and on 19 May 2009 the Sri Lankan government announced LTTE leader Prabhakaran's death (16 June 2009). Several sources indicate that the government announced the end of Sri Lanka's civil war on 18 May 2009 (HRW 3 June 2009; IANS 9 June 2009; Reuters 2 June 2009), while an article by the United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) indicates that President Mahinda Rajapaksa declared victory on 19 May 2009 (16 June 2009).

The Guardian reports that the UN and western governments have accused the Sri Lankan government of using heavy artillery in a "no-fire zone" that resulted in civilian casualties during the final stages of the war (4 June 2009). Sources indicate that the Sri Lankan government stopped attempts to "institute an inquiry into alleged war crimes" at the UN Human Rights Council session on Sri Lanka (*The Economist* 4 June 2009; Reuters 11 June 2009). The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), which operates out of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, indicates that the session was also called to investigate allegations that the LTTE used civilians as "human shields" (25-31 May 2009). According to the Human Rights Tribune, a Geneva-based website that publishes news and analysis on international human rights issues (21 Feb. 2008), the Sri Lankan government, supported by 12 allies, submitted a resolution before the session effectively resisting council scrutiny by invoking "'the principle of non-interference'," which is used for issues deemed to be domestic (22 May 2009). The ICPVTR reports that the final resolution - describing the conflict as a domestic matter - was supported by 29 votes and opposed by 12, while 6 countries abstained from voting (25-31 May 2009).

In early June 2009, the Sri Lankan parliament extended the state of emergency in Sri Lanka for an additional month (BBC 9 June 2009; IANS 9 June 2009). Sri Lanka has been under a state of emergency for most of the last 30 years and extensions must be voted on every month (ibid.; BBC 9 June 2009). In early July 2009, the state of emergency was extended again (AP 7 July 2009). This measure gives the military and police the ability to arrest and detain people without charge (BBC 9 June 2009; AP 7 July 2009). *The Economist* suggests that military recruitment has increased as the government attempts to de-mine and secure territory gained during the war (4 June 2009). Another *Economist* article indicates that the Sri Lankan army plans to recruit between 100,000 and 300,000 more soldiers (11 June 2009; see also Asia News Network 9 June 2009).

Civilians in IDP Camps

Sources indicate that the number of civilians in temporary camps (internally displaced persons, IDPs) in Sri Lanka is approximately 280,000 (UN 18 June 2009; *Christian Science Monitor* 19 June 2009) to 300,000 (*The Globe and Mail* 23 May 2009; International Crisis Group 16 June 2009). Civilians in these camps are not allowed to leave and have been prohibited from relocating with relatives or host families (*ibid.*; Asia News Network 9 June 2009). In July 2009, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated the following in regard to those living in the camps:

[the] lack of freedom of movement remains the overriding concern for this population, restricting its ability to reunite with family members outside the camps, access employment, attend regular schools, and ultimately choose their place of residence.

Government officials indicate that the need to de-mine northern Sri Lanka is delaying the relocation of civilians back to their homes (AP 18 July 2009; *The Economist* 11 June 2009). However, an 18 July 2009 Associated Press (AP) article suggests that de-mining experts consider the issue of de-mining to have been exaggerated. Additionally, the Sri Lankan government has communicated that civilian mobility has been restricted because authorities are searching for LTTE members who are suspected of hiding in the camps (UN 16 June 2009; AP 24 May 2009; *Christian Science Monitor* 19 June 2009).

The International Crisis Group indicates that those who are suspected of collaborating with the LTTE are separated from their families and brought to undisclosed locations for questioning (16 June 2009). According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and the International Crisis Group, no register of IDPs and those detained on suspicion of LTTE collaboration has been released, making it impossible to track them (AHRC 16 June 2009; International Crisis Group 16 June 2009). Reportedly, the government has admitted to the removal of approximately 10,000 people for questioning (AHRC 16 June 2009; AP 18 July 2009). *The Globe and Mail* reports that there are three "tiers" of camps based on different levels of security screening (23 May 2009). The camps in the first tier are referred to as "welfare villages" where the majority of IDPs are located; there are "rehabilitation centres" for suspected members of the LTTE; and there is one "high-security facility" in southern Sri Lanka where suspected senior-level LTTE members are located (*The Globe and Mail* 23 May 2009).

Both the AHRC and the International Crisis Group have indicated that they are concerned about disappearances of IDPs (AHRC 16 June 2009; International Crisis Group 16 June 2009). Citing INFORM, a human rights organization in Sri Lanka that gathered testimonies from the relatives of IDPs, AHRC estimates that 20 to 30 youth are removed from camps each day and their whereabouts are unknown (16 June 2009). The spokesperson for INFORM stated in an interview with Sinhala BBC Service that "persons wearing hoods are brought into the IDPs camps and that they indicate by signs as to whether one of the IDPs had connections with the LTTE or not"; those identified positively are removed from the camp (AHRC 16 June 2009).

The Globe and Mail reports that those detained in rehabilitation centres are made to identify other LTTE members (23 May 2009). Corroborating the above AHRC information, *The Globe and Mail* article quotes the director of health services in Trincomalee as saying that suspected LTTE members are "'taken before a group of men with hoods over their heads, who nod or shake their heads to say if they are fighters'" (23 May 2009). The article further notes that Tamils who lived in the LTTE-controlled north of Sri Lanka must undergo the screening process at a camp "if they wish to return to normal civilian life" (*The Globe and Mail* 23 May 2009).

In a 9 June 2009 operational update, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that they have visited approximately 5,000 people with links to the LTTE who are in rehabilitation centres. The ICRC continues to "work as a neutral intermediary between remaining LTTE personnel and the Sri Lankan government," and performs such tasks as "relaying information about individuals wishing to surrender" and maintaining records on those who have surrendered (9 June 2009).

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers indicates that "children (under-18s) are being abducted from refugee camps and from Vavuniya town in northern Sri Lanka by paramilitary groups who enjoy tacit support from the Sri Lankan government" (20 May 2009). Additionally, the Coalition states that "verified reports" indicate that the recruitment of children by paramilitary forces is occurring in the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 20 May 2009). Humanitarian workers relayed to the Coalition that the abductions were occurring at night when "scrutiny is minimal" and that the children "appear to have been abducted for alleged links to the LTTE, while others are kidnapped for ransom" (ibid.). In a July 2009 update on the situation of children, the Coalition indicated that it continues to receive reports of abductions perpetrated by "pro-government armed groups" (ibid. 28 July 2009). The Coalition considers the lack of independent monitoring at the camps a risk to the safety of child IDPs (ibid. 20 May 2009).

Sources indicate that access to the IDP camps has been restricted for civil society organizations and media (AHRC 16 June 2009; *The Globe and Mail* 23 May 2009). Though some humanitarian aid organizations have been permitted to enter the camps, there are sections of the camps that remain restricted (UN 5 June 2009; BBC 1 June 2009; *The Globe and Mail* 23 May 2009). According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of 18 June 2009, access to camps in Vavuniya had improved, though there were still "some delays." Additionally, two UN staff were arrested in June 2009 (UN 20 June 2009). The UN Country Team in Sri Lanka released a statement on 20 June 2009 indicating that the UN is in contact with the government regarding the arrests (ibid.). Information on whether they have been released could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Sources indicate that the living conditions within the camps are "unsatisfactory" (UN 11 June 2009; BBC 1 June 2009). An IRIN article relays that World Vision perceives the provision of water and sanitation to be a "major issue" at many of the 40 camps (UN 11 June 2009). Additionally, due to poor sanitation, diseases are spreading throughout the camps (ibid.; AP 24 May 2009). It is anticipated that upcoming seasonal rains will exacerbate the health situation (UN 11 June 2009; Asia News Network 9 June 2009; UN 18 June 2009). Specifically, Menik Farm camp, which is located outside Vavuniya in northern Sri Lanka, is said to hold 210,000 (AP 18 July 2009) to 220,000 people (UN 11 June 2009). It is overcrowded, with 10-15 people in tents designed for 5 (ibid.; AP 18 July 2009).

IRIN estimates that 13 percent of the IDP population in camps are children under 5 years of age and that approximately 10,000 children suffer from malnutrition (UN 5 June 2009). *The Globe and Mail*, citing UNICEF figures, estimates that 40 percent of the IDP population in camps are children (23 May 2009). Though UNICEF has the capacity to construct 21 nutrition centres at the camps, the organization indicated that it is having "access difficulties", which prevent it from meeting all needs (UN 5 June 2009). Another IRIN article suggests that obtaining food for infants and lactating mothers is an ongoing issue within the camps (UN 11 June 2009). According to OCHA, approximately 75,000 IDPs living in camps are women and girls in need of "basic hygiene support and reproductive health care" (UN 18 June 2009). An estimated 6,000 are pregnant and in need of obstetric care (ibid.).

According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the Sri Lankan government has accused those who speak out against the conditions in the camps - opposition leaders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - of engaging in a "political ploy" to discredit the government (19 June 2009). An AP article reports that aid organizations have been asked to sign agreements dictating that they will not issue public statements about camp conditions, unless authorization has been given (18 July 2009).

IDP Resettlement

Sources indicate that the Sri Lankan government has committed to resettling IDPs within six months (Reuters 11 June 2009; *Christian Science Monitor* 19 June 2009). However, the *Christian Science Monitor* quotes the spokesperson for the World Food Program as saying that "the government has not put forth a clear plan for all these returns to take place within six months" (19 June 2009). *The Globe and Mail* reports that a military official indicated that IDPs could be in the camps for approximately two years and that the chief of the UNICEF office in Trincomalee planned their support based on the assumption that IDPs would be in camps for up to three years (23 May 2009). An article in Bloomberg.com reports that the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka stated in July 2009 that approximately 60 percent of IDPs will be able to return to their homes by the end of 2009 (30 July 2009; AP 18 July 2009). The UN has released figures indicating that 3,054 people have been permitted to relocate to host families and homes for the elderly as of 11 June 2009; the majority of those who have relocated are elders, people with learning disabilities and members of "other vulnerable groups" (18 June 2009). The UNHCR provided an update to these figures in July 2009, stating that 5,483 IDPs, most of whom are elderly, have been released from the camps (UN July 2009).

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

Asia News Network. 9 June 2009. Tisarane Gunasekara. "Possible Futures in Post-War Sri Lanka." <<http://www.asianewsnet.net/news.php?id=6203&sec=3>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). 16 June 2009. "Sri Lanka: Registers on Entry and Leaving of Internally Displaced Persons Needs to be Created Urgently to Prevent Forced Disappearances." <<http://www.ahrchk.net/statements/mainfile.php/2009statements/2093/?print=yes>> [Accessed 23 June 2009]

Associated Press (AP). 18 July 2009. Ravi Nessman. "War Refugees Interned in Camps Built by Donors." (Factiva)

_____. 7 July 2009. "Sri Lanka Extends State of Emergency." (Factiva)

_____. 24 May 2009. Arthur Max. "Sri Lankan President Rejects UN Chief's Appeal for Full Access to Camps for War-Displaced." (Factiva)

Bloomberg.com. 30 July 2009. Paul Tighe. "Sri Lanka Arrests Tamil Rebel Operative in Colombo." <<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601091&sid=azAt74Chogg4#>> [Accessed 30 July 2009]

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 9 June 2009. "Sri Lanka Extends Emergency Laws." <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8091840.stm> [Accessed 25 June 2009]

_____. 1 June 2009. "Sri Lanka Tamils 'Facing Misery'." <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8076407.stm> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Christian Science Monitor [Boston]. 19 June 2009. Simon Montlake. "Sri Lanka's Postwar Resettlement Stalls." <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0619/p06s05-wosc.html>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. 28 July 2009. "Sri Lanka: End of Conflict Brings no Respite to Children from Human Rights Abuses." <http://www.child-soldiers.org/Sri_Lanka_1612_press_statement_28_July_2009.pdf> [Accessed 30 July 2009]

_____. 20 May 2009. "Sri Lanka: Child Soldiers Coalition Calls for UN Special Envoy to Urgently Investigate Abductions and Other Abuses of Children." <http://www.child-soldiers.org/Sri_Lanka_Special_Envoy_press_statement_20may09.pdf> [Accessed 25 June 2009]

The Economist. 11 June 2009. "Sri Lanka After the War: Victory's Rotten Fruits." <http://www.economist.com/opinion/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=13829429> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

_____. 4 June 2009. "The Human Cost of Sri Lanka's War: Too Many Heroes." <http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13794780> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

The Globe and Mail [Toronto]. 23 May 2009. Doug Saunders. "Tamils' Fate: Locked Up, Hidden Away." <<http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20090523.LANKA23ART2229/TPStory/TPInternational/?pageRequested=all&print=true>> [Accessed 3 July 2009]

The Guardian [London]. 4 June 2009. Julian Borger. "Sri Lanka Says up to 5,000 Civilians Died in Tigers Battle." <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/04/sri-lanka-civilians-tigers-battle/print>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Human Rights Tribune. 22 May 2009. "UN Watch Slams Sri Lanka and Allies for Preempting UN Emergency Session with Self-Congratulatory Resolution." <<http://www.humanrights-geneva.info/UN-Watch-slams-Sri-Lanka-and,4480>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

_____. 21 February 2008. "About Us." <<http://www.humanrights-geneva.info/About-us,293>> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2009]

Human Rights Watch (HRW). 3 June 2009. "Sri Lanka: Avoid a Postwar Witch Hunt." <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/06/03/sri-lanka-avoid-postwar-witch-hunt?print>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Indo-Asian News Service (IANS). 9 June 2009. "Sri Lanka Extends Emergency to Deal with Tamil Tiger Remnants." (Thaindian News) <http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/sri-lanka-extends-emergency-to-deal-with-tamil-tiger-remnants_100202907.html> [Accessed 29 June 2009]

International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR). 25-31 May 2009. "Weekly Country Report: Sri Lanka." (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) <<http://www.pvtr.org/pdf/weekly%20reports/SriLanka-25-31May09.pdf>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). 9 June 2009. "Sri Lanka: ICRC Assists Thousands of Persons in Government-Run Sites for the Displaced." <http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/sri-lanka-update-090609?OpenDocument&style=custo_print> [Accessed 3 July 2009]

International Crisis Group. 16 June 2009. "Sri Lanka: After the War." <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6070&l=1#C1>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Reuters. 11 June 2009. Ranga Sirilal. "Major Post-War Aid to Sri Lanka Will Take Time - Japan." <<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/COL492133.htm>> [Accessed 25 June 2009]

_____. 2 June 2009. Ranga Sirilal. "Stark Warnings for Those Seen Traitors in Sri Lanka." (Factiva)

United Nations (UN). July 2009. UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). "Note on the Applicability of the 2009 Sri Lanka Guidelines." <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a6817e22.html>> [Accessed 23 July 2009]

_____. 20 June 2009. Country Team in Sri Lanka. "Statement on Arrested Staff Members." <<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/ASAZ-7T9HJR?OpenDocument>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

_____. 18 June 2009. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "Sri Lanka - Vanni Emergency: Situation Report #22." <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/retrieveattachments?openagent&shortid=SODA-7T5Q9U&file=Full_Report.pdf> [Accessed 26 June 2009]

_____. 16 June 2009. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). "Sri Lanka: Finding a Path to Reconciliation - Analysis." <<http://www.irinnews.org/PrintReport.aspx?ReportId=84858>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

_____. 11 June 2009. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). "Sri Lanka: 'Too Many People' at Huge IDP Camp - UN." <<http://www.irinnews.org/PrintReport.aspx?ReportId=84805>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

_____. 5 June 2009. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). "Sri Lanka: Growing Concern Over Nutrition of Displaced Children." <<http://www.irinnews.org/PrintReport.aspx?ReportId=8472>> [Accessed 24 June 2009]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Amnesty International (AI), the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC) and a senior fellow at Carleton University could not provide information on this subject. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre in Sri Lanka, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) and a reporter who writes for the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) did not respond within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order - Sri Lanka, Minority Rights Group (MRG) International, ReliefWeb, South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC), South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), *Sunday Observer* [Colombo], University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna).

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.