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Venezuela: Treatment of citizens of East Indian descent by the police and general population
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Estimates on the size of the East Indian community in Venezuela range between 60 (PROVEA 24 June 2004) and 80 families, of which 35 are in Caracas (Embassy n.d.a). According to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (IMEA), among the approximately 690 East Indians living in Venezuela, 400 were Venezuelans of East Indian origin, 280 were Indian citizens, and 10 were stateless residents (India Dec. 2001). The Embassy has recently revived the Association of Indians of Venezuela (AIV), which elected a committee in November 2003, and the association puts on special events coinciding with Hindu holidays (Embassy n.d.a). The Indian Embassy Website lists the names of 50 members of the community (ibid., n.d.b) as well as information on 11 Indian religious institutions and four shops carrying Indian goods (ibid., n.d.c).

The IMEA maintains that East Indians are guaranteed equal rights and protection from discrimination by the Constitution of Venezuela, which it states is beneficial to their situation as East Indians in Venezuela (2000, 241). While one source indicates that most East Indians were businessmen, professionals, and professors (Embassy n.d.a), another source mentions that the East Indians were highly educated and mainly employed in the retail industry, with a small number in high tech (India 2000). According to the IMEA, East Indians gained a higher per capita income than the national average in Venezuela; they "...have adapted themselves very well to their country of residence and are generally held in high regard by the local people on account of their hard work, expertise and non-political nature" (ibid.). Furthermore, there is a growing interest among non-East Indian Venezuelans in Indian spirituality, with several Sai Baba, Radha Soami, and Hare Krishna Centres as well as Rama Krishna Missions throughout the country (ibid.).

A representative from the AIV provided the following information during a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 24 June 2004. In general, the treatment of East Indians by fellow Venezuelans is quite good. However, the current political situation has exacerbated the divisions that exist between rich and poor resulting in tensions between these classes. According to the representative, the poor often have a negative opinion of the rich, and many assume that East Indians or foreigners are either rich or middle-class. On the other hand, the representative stated that discrimination against East Indians was not apparent in Venezuela, where interethnic mixing is common. In addition, the representative denied having heard of any incidents of violence, harassment

or intimidation directed toward persons of East Indian origin. As for police protection, the representative explained that three out of the five zones that comprise Greater Caracas (where the majority of East Indians live) have good police protection. According to the representative, all the Caracas East Indian families lived in two zones (Baruta and Chacao) where police protection was not a problem.

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 24 June 2004, the general coordinator of the Venezuelan Program of Action and Education in Human Rights (Programa Venezolano de Educación y Acción en Derechos Humanos - PROVEA) corroborated the statement by the AIV representative concerning the lack of discrimination against persons of East Indian descent in Venezuela. The coordinator said that he had never heard of a case of violence, harassment, or discrimination directed toward a person of East Indian background.

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Association of Indians of Venezuela (AIV). 24 June 2004. Telephone interview with a representative.

Embassy of India in Caracas, Venezuela. n.d.a. "Indo-Venezuelan Relations." <<http://www.embindia.org/indo-venrelations.htm>> [Accessed 24 June 2004]

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Programa venezolano de educación-acción en derechos humanos (PROVEA). 24 June 2004. Telephone interview with the general coordinator.

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