

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please advise whether attacks by the LTTE against civilians in Colombo have increased? If so, since when? Or are they still largely targeted at military and/or politicians?**
- 2. Are Sinhalese Buddhists who are living in Colombo particularly vulnerable to LTTE attack (bombings or otherwise)?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please advise whether attacks by the LTTE against civilians in Colombo have increased? If so, since when? Or are they still largely targeted at military and/or politicians?**

According to several reports LTTE attacks in Colombo have increased in recent times and appear to be indiscriminate, causing harm to civilians:

the LTTE retained the ability to strike almost anywhere in the country, carrying out bus bombings, suicide attacks, assaults on military bases, and its first-ever aerial assault on the Colombo airport.

...

Conditions in the north and east have markedly deteriorated in the past two years, with rising hostilities creating a humanitarian crisis and leading to a variety of human rights abuses (Freedom House 2008, *Freedom in the World 2008 – Sri Lanka*, 2 July - <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7493&year=2008> – Accessed 1 September 2008 - Attachment 1)

AI highlights the fact that there are high risks of violent indiscriminate attacks:

At least two women and a 12 year old child died today when unidentified gunmen fired at a bus. Another person also died in the ambush. Around 26 others were injured in the attack, which took place in Buttala, south east of the capital, Colombo.

...

"These indiscriminate attacks are brutal. The victims are overwhelmingly people who are trying to go about their everyday lives, living in fear of attacks at any time, with the added untold suffering this brings to their relatives. The total disregard for the safety of civilians is completely indefensible," said Amnesty International. (Amnesty International 2008, *Sri Lanka: Civilians continue to face deadly daily threat*, 11 July.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/sri-lanka-civilians-continue-face-deadly-daily-threat-20080711> - Accessed 1 September 2008 - Attachment 2)

Another random attack occurred on 31 August 2008 targeting shoppers:

A package left near a fruit vendor exploded in Pettah, the main commercial hub of the capital, police said.

The blast was also a short distance away from the main bus station.

"We have sent 43 people to hospital," a military official at the scene said. A spokesman for the Colombo national hospital said three of the victims were in a serious condition. Police cordoned off the bustling area following the bombing...

(‘Blast injures 43’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 1 September – Attachment 3)

2. Are Sinhalese Buddhists who are living in Colombo particularly vulnerable to LTTE attack (bombings or otherwise)?

As indicated above the violence in Colombo is indiscriminate. However, the statistics indicate Sinhalese are at far lesser risk of disappearances:

With 52 points, Sri Lanka ranks South Asia’s No.1 human rights violator...

(pp17)

According to a finding by Law & Society Trust, in collaboration with four local partners, including the Civil Monitoring Commission and the Free Media Movement, 540 persons disappeared across Sri Lanka from January to August 2007. Again, Tamils suffered disproportionately from disappearances – 78.89%, compared with 1.85% Sinhalese and 3.52% Muslims. Jaffna district was worst affected by disappearances (50.19%) followed by Colombo with 14.44%. (pp18)

...

VII. Freedom of the Press

On 30 May 2007, Tiran Alles, publisher of the Sinhala weekly *Mawbima*, was reportedly arrested by a police team from the Terrorist Intelligence Bureau from a private hospital in Colombo (pp25)

(Asian Centre for Human Rights 2008, *Sri Lanka* ‘South Asia Human Rights Index 2008’, ‘2008, ACHR website - 1 August <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/SAARC-2008.pdf> - Accessed 4 August - Attachment 4)

This information is corroborated by the following Human Rights Watch report in which it is stated:

Who Is Being Targeted?

No matter who is responsible for the “disappearances,” the vast majority of the victims are ethnic Tamils, although Muslims and Sinhalese have also been targeted. (pp6)

(‘Human Rights Watch 2008, ‘Recurring Nightmare: State Responsibility for ‘Disappearances’ and Abductions in Sri Lanka’, HRW website, March <http://hrw.org/reports/2008/srilanka0308> - Accessed 7 March 2008 - Attachment 5)

In February the International Crisis Group made the following assessment:

Sri Lanka is in civil war again, and there are no prospects of a peace process resuming soon. On 2 January 2008, the government announced its withdrawal from a ceasefire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

...

In addition to heavy fighting in the north, the first weeks of 2008 have seen the assassinations of a government minister and a Tamil opposition member of parliament, multiple bombings in Colombo, a wave of deadly attacks on civilians in the majority Sinhalese south, and widespread disappearances and killings of non-combatants in the north and east. (ppii)

...

The Tigers showed they can strike in and around Colombo, with a suicide bombing at the main rail station on 3 February 2008 that killed twelve and wounded nearly 100. (pp2)

Sinhalese, too, are feeling insecure. The rash of attacks on Sinhalese civilians in Colombo and in the south east bear all the hallmarks of the LTTE and are likely designed to stir up ethnic tensions and provoke retaliatory attacks on Tamils. (pp18)

(International Crisis Group 2008, ‘Sri Lanka’s Return to War: Limiting the Damage’ Asia Report No. 146, ICG website,

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5305> – Accessed 1 September 2008- Attachment 6)

This report of December 2007 notes that Sinhalese who make adverse comments about the government are also at risk:

Even Sinhalese who are critical of the government about the way the war is conducted, are dubbed by nationalist politicians as Sinhala Koti or Sinhala Tigers. (pp6)

Killings, abductions and disappearances – unknown perpetrators

In a large proportion of the spiralling violations that have occurred in Sri Lanka since December 2006 and continue to take place in the country, including the more high-profile ones such as extra-judicial killing, abductions and enforced disappearances, the perpetrators are unknown.

...

Since mid 2006 the numbers of killings, abductions and disappearances have shown a phenomenal increase. (pp7)

(Minority Rights Group International 2008, ‘One year on: counter-terrorism sparks human rights crisis for Sri Lanka’s minorities’, MRG website, December

<http://www.minorityrights.org/report.php?id=437> - Accessed 23 January 2008.

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

UK Home Office website <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk>

US Department of State website <http://www.state.gov>

Immigration and Refugee Board Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>

United Nations (UN)

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International website <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch (HRW) website <http://www.hrw.org/>

Asian Centre for Human Rights <http://www.achrweb.org/>

International Crisis Group <http://www.crisisgroup.org/>

Minority Rights Group <http://www.minorityrights.org/>

Freedom House <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

International News & Politics

BBC News website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

Search Engines

AlltheWeb search engine <http://www.alltheweb.com/>

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Ask.com search engine <http://www.ask.com>

Yahoo search engine <http://search.yahoo.com>

Copernic search engine

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Freedom House 2008, *Freedom in the World 2008 – Sri Lanka*, 2 July. UNHCR Refworld - <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7493&year=2008> – Accessed 1 September 2008.

2. Amnesty International 2008, *Sri Lanka: Civilians continue to face deadly daily threat*, 11 July. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/sri-lanka-civilians-continue-face-deadly-daily-threat-20080711> - Accessed 1 September 2008.

3. ‘Blast injures 43’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 1 September. (FACTIVA)

4. Asian Centre for Human Rights 2008, ‘Sri Lanka’ *South Asia Human Rights Index, 2008*, ACHR website, 1 August <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/SAARC-2008.pdf> - Accessed 4 August.

5. ‘Human Rights Watch 2008, ‘Recurring Nightmare: State Responsibility for ‘Disappearances’ and Abductions in Sri Lanka’, HRW website, March <http://hrw.org/reports/2008/srilanka0308> - Accessed 7 March 2008.

6. International Crisis Group 2008, ‘Sri Lanka’s Return to War: limiting the Damage’ Asia Report No. 146, ICG website, 20 February

(http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/south_asia/sri_lanka/146_sri_lanka_s_return_to_war_limiting_the_damage.pdf) - Accessed 1 September.

7. Minority Rights Group 2008, 'One year on: counter-terrorism sparks human rights crisis for Sri Lanka's minorities', MRG website, December
<http://www.minorityrights.org/report.php?id=437> - Accessed 23 January 2008.