



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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14 December 2005

### LKA100500.E

Sri Lanka: The national identity card, including issuance procedures, significance of identity numbers and physical description (2002 - 2005)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### Issuance Procedures

Following amendments to the *Registration of Persons Act No. 32* in 1981, citizens of Sri Lanka 16 years of age and older must be registered with the Department of Registration of Persons and be issued a national identity card (Sri Lanka 22 Nov. 2005). In a meeting with the Research Directorate, the first secretary at the high commission of Sri Lanka in Ottawa stated that residents may obtain and submit an application form for an identity card to the *Grama Niladari*, or village-level office under the supervision of the Divisional Secretariat (5 Dec. 2005). After verifying that the information provided by the applicant is complete, the *Grama Niladari* sends the application to the Divisional Secretariat, which forwards it to the Commissioner of the Department of Registration of Persons after completing its own set of procedures (Sri Lanka 5 Dec. 2005). According to information contained on the Department of Registration of Persons Website, students and estate residents may also submit application forms to their school principal or estate superintendent, respectively (ibid. 22 Nov. 2005).

The issuance procedure takes about three months (ibid. 5 Dec. 2003). Once the card is ready, the applicant may pick it up at the *Grama Niladari* or may upon request have the Divisional Secretariat send it by post (ibid.).

#### Physical Description and Identity Numbers

In a 5 December 2005 meeting with the Research Directorate, the first secretary of the high commission of Sri Lanka in Ottawa provided the following information on the appearance of the national identity card. The card is yellow and laminated. On the front appear the emblem of Sri Lanka, the identity card number, and a scanned black and white photograph of the holder (placed in the centre of the card). At the bottom of the card are the date of issue and the printed signature of the commissioner of the Department of Registration of Persons. The name of the holder, the person's mailing address, date of birth, and occupation (if applicable) appear on the back of the card. Earlier information received by the Research Directorate indicates that the sex of the holder and the place of birth also appear on the back of the identity card (Sri Lanka 14 Apr. 2004). The date of birth is printed as a four-digit year and a two-digit month and day separated by dots, while the date of issue appears as a two-digit year, month

and day with dashes or dots between the numbers (ibid.).

Identity card numbers are assigned according to the date of birth: the first two digits indicate the year of birth while the remaining numbers are assigned by the Department of Registration of Persons (ibid. 5 Dec. 2005).

### **Replacement Cards**

According to the first secretary of the high commission, if the national identity card is lost, a new card issued to the holder will contain a replacement number separate from the identity card number (5 Dec. 2005). The last digit of the replacement number indicates the number of replacement cards issued to the holder (Sri Lanka 5 Dec. 2005). The identity card number on a replacement card is the one originally assigned to the holder (ibid.).

### **Additional Information**

In October 2004, the *Elections Act (Special Provisions)* was passed by the Sri Lankan parliament, making it compulsory for citizens to produce their national identity cards when voting in an election (Refugee Council 25 Oct. 2004; Sri Lanka 8 Oct. 2004). The law was to come into force after 7 October 2005 and once the government had issued identity cards to all eligible voters (ibid; Refugee Council 25 Oct. 2004). According to minority opposition parties, close to three million Sri Lankans did not hold identity cards in October 2004 (ibid). The Refugee Council, a London-based organization that works with refugees and asylum-seekers (Refugee Council n.d.), pointed out in a briefing that most of the people without identity cards were Hill Country Tamils or those who had lost their identity documents as a result of war or displacement (ibid. 25 Oct. 2004). According to the Refugee Council, government forces had on several occasions destroyed the identity cards of Tamils "in order to arrest and detain them" (ibid.). The *Daily News* reported that, by July 2005, only 10,000 applications for new identity cards had been received despite efforts by the government to expedite the procedure, including deploying mobile units to villages to process applications (10 July 2005). Information on whether national identity cards had been issued to all eligible voters by October 2005 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); Embassy of Sri Lanka, Washington, DC; Humanitarian Information Centre for Sri Lanka; Norwegian Refugee Council; Sri Lanka Government Web Portal.

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