



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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### LKA100503.E

Sri Lanka: Procedures used to verify Sri Lankan identity documents; the incidence of spelling errors on stamps used by Sri Lankan officials (1998 - 1999)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Current information on document verification procedures followed by the Canadian mission in Sri Lanka that would update Response to Information Request ZZZ31915 of 2 March 1999 (repeated below) could not be obtained from the mission within the time constraints of this Response.

The following information was provided to the Research Directorate by the Canadian high commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka in March 1999.

According to the Immigration Control Officer Unit at the high commission, the process of document verification as conducted by the Canadian high commission makes it difficult and non-credible to link the verification of birth certificates to creating a refugee-sur-place situation.

There are no security features in a Sri Lankan birth certificate. In addition, different types of paper are used to create the document, depending on the time period and location of its production. Also, counterfeit certificates produced on the same paper used for production of the genuine document are available in Sri Lanka. There are no security controls on the genuine printed paper and no assurance against stolen blanks. As a result, authenticity cannot be determined by a visual examination of the document itself. Checking against the record book is the best and only method of verification.

The Canadian high commission regularly submits large batches of statutory documents to the Central Registry for verification. The same is done by at least 12 other missions, as well as several local government authorities including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the passport office, and the Identity Card office. The Central Registry receives many thousands of such requests every month.

The batches of photocopies submitted by the Canadian high commission include documents from all types of applications, the bulk being from the family class. The high commission submits documents for verification for family class applications, for independent applications, for visitor visa applications, and occasionally for administrative purposes. The documents are presented with no differentiation as to where the request for verification originated. There is never a mention of an individual being a refugee claimant, nor is the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) mentioned. Documents submitted originate from Tamils,

Sinhalese, Muslims, Christians, Burghers, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.

Not every document can be verified with Canadian eyes only. The change in procedure in 1998 (from Canadian officer verification to verification by Central Registry staff) was brought about by the Central Registry in an attempt to remove access to the archives for persons other than Central Registry staff and to maintain the integrity of their records. The Canadian high commission had to negotiate a procedure with them that was acceptable to both parties, and it was negotiated as a block with other foreign missions. One of the aims was to make sure that Canadian officers would retain the ability to verify up to five per cent of the documents as a quality control check.

Canadian officers also have access to the office itself. A member of the high commission staff goes to the registry twice a week, where he or she is closely involved in the verification process and where he can see the books with his own eyes. Documents are submitted for verification on a risk management basis and the high commission generally verifies only five per cent of the documents that are submitted with visa applications.

In 1998, the high commission reported being content with the procedure, and according to the Immigration Control Officer's Unit, even if they were allowed to verify all the documents with Canadian eyes only, they would not because a) they trust the system; b) they do not have the manpower to manipulate all volumes; c) they do not see a risk of creating a refugee-sur-place; and d) Canadian eyes that read Sinhalese and Tamil would be required.

As for the Central Registry itself, it is not computerized. There are a few clerks who retrieve the original registry record books and compare the records to the photocopies submitted by the high commission. They are not enforcement officers. They have one photocopier in the entire five storey building, which was donated by the Swiss government. This small group of clerks checks the thousands of verification requests that come from several embassies and the local authorities. The birth certificate records are not attached or cross referenced to any address record, passport number, identification card number, telephone number, etc. The location of the individual cannot be determined from their birth certificate record. The Registry keeps no other records and has no computers.

There are no computers at the airport either. If the Sri Lankan government officials had a list of fraudulent documents detected by the registry (which, according to the high commission, they do not) a manual check at the airport against such a list would be both cumbersome and not feasible.

Officials from the Canadian high commission have been in every room in the Central Registry building from top to bottom and know all of the staff involved in the verification procedure. They are essentially a group of clerks who watch over a massive collection of documents that have been manually bound as books.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is used by some foreign missions to verify documents. The MFA verifies the document and provides a response with an MFA seal. According to the Canadian high commission, verifying documents in this fashion is a clear signal to the Sri Lankan government that the applicant is overseas, and other missions have commented to the Canadian high commission that they prefer the Canadian system as it completely masks the origin of the request.

The Canadian high commission noted that the government of Sri Lanka is well aware that there are thousands of Sri Lankans overseas making refugee claims. They do not need to find this out from the Central Registry. Their missions abroad can probably find out more from the hearings in Canada, and from the Sri Lankan communities in Canada, and by following the requests for travel documentation when they return to Sri Lanka.

The Central Registry does not report counterfeit documents they identify to the police or to anyone else other than the originator of the verification request. To the knowledge of the Canadian high commission, they do not keep, nor do they copy the documents that are submitted. With their single photocopier, limited staff, low budget and high fraudulent detection rate overall, it is highly unlikely that they could keep copies. Originals are not submitted to the Central Registry, and originals would be required if an arrest were to be made of a person presenting a fraudulent document.

The Canadian high commission is of the opinion that if the documents from the IRB were no longer submitted, Canada would be left open to massive and increasing fraud as witnessed and reported by other missions. One other foreign mission, which only in the summer of 1998 began submitting document verification using the Canadian model, has struggled to bring their detection rate down to 60 per cent fraudulent documents. The Canadian rate has dropped considerably as the integrity of the process has been refined. The deterrent factor of checking has been clearly established.

Regarding the incidence of spelling errors in stamps used by Sri Lankan officials, in September 1998 the Canadian high commission approached the Registrar at the Department of Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in Colombo, with examples of genuine documents containing stamps with spelling errors and found that some of the Registrar's official rubber stamps did contain spelling errors as alleged (Canada 12 Jan. 1999). The Registrar was unaware of how these stamps had entered their stock; however, the problem was corrected and documents issued after September 1998 should not have stamps that contain spelling errors (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.

#### References

Canada. 30 March 1999. Canadian High Commission, Colombo. Correspondence received from Refugee Branch, Asylum Division, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

\_\_\_\_\_. 26 March 1999. Canadian High Commission, Colombo. Correspondence received from Refugee Branch, Asylum Division, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

\_\_\_\_\_. 12 January 1999. Canadian High Commission, Colombo. Correspondence received from Refugee Branch, Asylum Division, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

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