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Sri Lanka: Security measures in place to control the movement of Tamils between northern and southern regions of the country (August 2005 - September 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In June 2006, the government of Sri Lanka announced that security measures in effect prior to the 2002 cease-fire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would be re-imposed because of the country's "fragile security situation" (Xinhua 28 June 2006; see also EIU 11 Aug. 2006). Human rights and news sources from 2005 and 2006 report the imposition of a number of security measures, including:

- curfews (UN 25 Aug. 2006; BBC 30 Aug. 2006; *Daily News* 28 Aug. 2006);
- an increased number of checkpoints (*Le Figaro* 2 May 2006; Xinhua 15 Aug. 2006);
- road blocks (Canada 15 Aug. 2006; TamilNet 28 Aug. 2006; AFP 2 June 2006); and
- the closure of roads (UN 18 Aug. 2006; *Daily News* 22 Aug. 2006) and entry points between LTTE-controlled and government-controlled areas (TamilNet 24 Aug. 2006; *ibid.* 12 Aug. 2006; ICRC 22 Aug. 2006).

The movement of people between the two areas has reportedly decreased "considerably" as a result of the security situation and restrictions imposed by both the government and the LTTE (*ibid.* 30 Aug. 2006; see also Reuters 6 Sept. 2006).

According to a report on internal displacement in Sri Lanka prepared by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), in February 2005, Tamils were no longer required to have travel passes in order to move around the country (1 Sept. 2005). In 15 September 2006 correspondence, an official at the Canadian High Commission in Colombo further clarified that,

[although] all travellers coming from the North and East of the country to Colombo are now more likely to be questioned and searched than during the 2002 to 2005 period, ... the system of travel passes for Tamil civilians that existed in the conflict years [prior to 2002] has not been reinstated (Canada 15 Sept. 2006).

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate, however, indicate that Tamils may be asked by Sri Lankan security forces to produce their national

identity cards (AI 29 June 2006; AP 31 Dec. 2005). In a December 2005 door-to-door search for LTTE members in Colombo, Sri Lankan security forces detained over 900 people for failing to produce their national identity cards or for not having a valid reason for staying in the city (AP 31 Dec. 2005). Security forces later released 867 of the detainees, but kept the others for further questioning (ibid.). No information on whether charges were laid could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

A state of emergency imposed in August 2005 and still in effect as of September 2006 (Australia 20 Sept. 2006), reportedly gives Sri Lankan security forces the authority to close roads without notice, set up road blocks and impose curfews (ibid. 1 Sept. 2006), as well as make arrests without warrants and detain individuals for up to 12 months without trial (US 8 Mar. 2006, Introduction).

According to a 15 August 2006 briefing note on Sri Lanka by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), strict curfews in Jaffna district in the north have prevented civilians from travelling long distances to safe areas (see also BBC 30 Aug. 2006). By late August 2006, however, daytime curfews had reportedly been relaxed, allowing civilians between four and six hours of unrestricted movement each day (UN 25 Aug. 2006; *Daily News* 28 Aug. 2006), depending on their location (ibid.).

News sources from 2006 report an increase in the number of checkpoints and roadblocks in the capital city of Colombo (Xinhua 15 Aug. 2006; AFP 2 June 2006; *The Press Trust of India* 27 Aug. 2006), as part of an effort to prevent LTTE bomb attacks (ibid.; AFP 2 June 2006). In late August 2006, road blocks were reportedly set up on all the main roads leading to Colombo (TamilNet 28 Aug. 2006), and every vehicle entering and leaving the city was checked (ibid.; *The Press Trust of India* 27 Aug. 2006). Other security measures in Colombo include parking restrictions along busy roads (Xinhua 15 Aug. 2006), increased military personnel patrolling the streets (Canada 15 Aug. 2006), and body searches of individuals wishing to enter public buildings and shopping centres (AFP 2 June 2006).

According to an official at the Canadian High Commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka,

some visible [security] measures [implemented since December 2005] include new checkpoints, more frequent searches of vehicles at checkpoints and [a] complete check of intercity buses entering Colombo, forcing passengers to [get off] and vouch for their luggage (Canada 15 Sept. 2006).

The main road between Colombo to Batticaloa [eastern Sri Lanka] is reportedly scattered with government security checkpoints and soldiers stop vehicles along the way to check passports and identity cards (*World Today* 1 Mar. 2006; see also *South China Morning Post* 4 July 2006). According to a 4 July 2006 *South China Morning Post* news article,

[o]n the main road into [Batticaloa], Route 11, army fortifications, road blocks and lookout towers have been built every 500 metres, starting more than 30 km out. Controlled fires destroy scrub and trees to deprive the Tigers of hiding places. No car or bus gets into the city without two thorough searches.

Roads and entry points between LTTE-controlled and government-

controlled areas can reportedly be closed without notice (Australia 1 Sept. 2006; TamilNet 12 Aug. 2006). According to an 18 August 2006 UNHCR news release, the A9 access road from the Jaffna peninsula through to Kilinochchi district was closed (UN 18 Aug. 2006). Information on how long the road was closed could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In August 2006, news sources reported on the closure of the Omanthai entry point (TamilNet 12 Aug. 2006; *Daily News* 30 Aug. 2006), 13 km north of the town of Vavuniya (TamilNet 24 Aug. 2006), leaving hundreds of civilians trapped on both sides (ibid. 12 Aug. 2006). Although the entry point opened briefly on 21 and 22 August to allow the passage of some 250 civilians (ICRC 22 Aug. 2006; *Daily News* 22 Aug. 2006), it was closed again following a confrontation in the area between the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE (TamilNet 24 Aug. 2006; *Daily News* 30 Aug. 2006). Other entry points in the Vavuniya and Mannar districts were also reportedly closed in August 2006 (TamilNet 12 Aug. 2006). Information on whether these entry points or the Omanthai entry point had been re-opened could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to 15 September 2006 correspondence from an official at the Canadian Embassy in Colombo,

[t]ravellers coming from LTTE-controlled areas of the North and East face the additional hurdle of having to cross the forward defence lines of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army. The respective [entry points] of the LTTE and [Sri Lankan] Army have been opened only sparsely since 11 August 2006 (Canada 15 Sept. 2006).

A 25 August 2006 press release by the UNHCR indicates that on Jaffna peninsula, "road sea and air links to the outside world have been cut." Later that month, however, several relief trucks were granted access to certain areas and relief supplies were shipped to the peninsula (UN 25 Aug. 2006; Canada 15 Sept. 2006). UN chartered flights carrying relief supplies also reportedly landed in Jaffna (ibid.). On 5 September 2006, the government of Sri Lanka announced that domestic flights between Colombo and Jaffna had resumed (Sri Lanka 5 Sept. 2006).

According to the UNHCR, the majority of people leaving the northern Jaffna peninsula have been "fleeing on foot, with a lucky few on tractors" (UN 25 Aug. 2006).

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.

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Oral sources: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation in Colombo, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sri Lanka High Commission in Ottawa, and South Asia Partnership (SAP) Canada did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: European Country of Origin Information Network (Ecoi.net), Factiva, Freedom House, Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) for Sri Lanka, Human Rights Watch, The Refugee Council [United Kingdom], ReliefWeb, South Asia Partnership (SAP) Canada, United Kingdom Home Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States Department of State.

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