



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
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Sri Lanka: Treatment of Tamils in Colombo by members of the Sri Lankan security forces and police (2005 - 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

According to Sri Lanka's 2001 Census of Population and Housing, Sri Lankan Tamils represent approximately eleven percent of Colombo's population, while Indian Tamils account for just over one percent. Sources consulted by the Research Directorate generally do not make the distinction between Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils. Unless specifically noted, information presented in this Response refers to Tamils in general.

Registration of Tamils with police

In June 2006, the government of Sri Lanka reportedly announced that Tamils living in the capital city and its suburbs, as well as plantation Tamils living in hill country, would be required to register with the Sri Lankan police in their residential area (TamilNet 30 June 2006). According to the Deputy Inspector General of Police (IGP) in Colombo, cited in a 30 June 2006 TamilNet news article, Tamils visiting relatives and those temporarily living in boarding houses must also register with the police. The Deputy IGP further noted that public and private businesses must register Tamil workers (TamilNet 30 June 2006). Concerning the registration forms, the Deputy IGP stated that the forms are

prepared by the Sri Lanka President's office [and] are to be distributed by the [Sri Lanka] Police assisted by the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) cadres to homes. Occupants are expected to complete the registration forms in front of the attending security personnel. (ibid.)

According to the Deputy IGP, the registration system is intended to improve security in Colombo and prevent attacks from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (ibid.).

Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) similarly noted the introduction of a registration system for Tamils visiting Colombo (26 Sept. 2006). The UNHCR Representative stated that

a regulation has recently been enforced requiring all Tamils from outside Colombo to register with the police if they are staying in Colombo with family, friends or in guesthouses. Such regulations were also in place during the height of the conflict in the 1990s. (26 Sept. 2006)

Arrest and detention of Tamils

There have been reports of Sri Lankan security forces carrying out search operations in Colombo and arresting large numbers of ethnic Tamils (*The New York Times* 1 Jan. 2006; AP 31 Dec. 2005; TamilNet 28 Aug. 2006; UK Apr. 2006, 12; AFP 31 Dec. 2005;). In a December 2005 door-to-door search for LTTE members in Colombo, Sri Lankan security forces detained over 900 people (ibid.; AP 31 Dec. 2005; *The New York Times* 1 Jan. 2006). Searches were reportedly carried out in predominantly Tamil areas of the city (ibid.; AFP 31 Dec. 2005; 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 13 February 2006 letter from the British High Commission in Colombo to the United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, cited in an April 2006 UK Home Office report on Sri Lanka, states that

[t]he Sri Lankan authorities had launched a number of "cordon and search" operations in recent weeks. Of these the largest [was] in Colombo on 31 December [2005]. ... About 1,000 people had been arrested, most had been detained briefly, but released after fingerprinting or photographs had been taken. (12)

The letter further states that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) had asked the Sri Lankan authorities to explain the purpose of the search operations and that

[the authorities] had initially argued that the operations were aimed at ordinary criminals, but also caught some security suspects. The HRCSL disagreed; the ethnic balance of the suspects show[ed] it was a security operation, i.e., most arrested were Tamil. (UK Apr. 2006, 12)

According to 26 September 2005 letter from the British High Commission in Colombo, cited in a 31 October 2006 UK Home Office report on Sri Lanka,

[t]he Western Province Peoples Front (WPPF, a political party representing Tamils in Colombo ...) said that there was serious harassment of Tamils. They had documented over 500 detentions under the [Emergency] regulations and the reintroduction of House Registration (used to track the identity of individual members of houses) which had been suspended since 2002. They also linked the Emergency regulations to the abduction and murders of five Tamil civilians in Colombo.... (36).

In October 2006, TamilNet reported that, according to civil society sources, "the escalating number of Tamil youths arrested in Colombo and in other areas in the south has alarmed Tamil communities living outside [the] northeast" (5 Oct. 2006).

Abductions, disappearances and killings of Tamils

Media sources from 2006 report abductions and killings of Tamils in Colombo (World Institute for Asian Studies 4 Nov. 2006; *Colombo Page* 3 Nov. 2006; *Hindustan Times* 14 Sept. 2006). In October 2006, *Asian Tribune* reported that an "ad hoc voluntary organization" called the Civil Monitoring Committee (CMC) had recently been formed in Colombo to monitor and report on abductions and killings in Sri Lanka (World Institute for Asian Studies 15 Oct. 2006). The CMC found that between April 2006 and September 2006 in the city of Colombo and its suburbs, twenty-two people had disappeared or been abducted and were still missing, nine people had been abducted and killed, and seven people had been abducted and released by their captors, in some cases after payment of ransom (World Institute for Asian Studies 15 Oct. 2006). The CMC later reported that, by the end of October 2006, in the city of Colombo, a total of fifty-four persons had been abducted, thirty-six were still missing,

nine had been killed and nine had been released "after alleged payment of ransom" (ibid. 4 Nov. 2006; *Colombo Page* 3 Nov. 2006). According the CMC, the majority of the abducted, missing, and killed were of Tamil ethnicity (ibid.; World Institute for Asian Studies 4 Nov. 2006). Those Tamils affected reportedly include businessmen and civilians (TamilNet 19 Sept. 2006; World Institute for Asian Studies 15 Oct. 2006).

The Tamil community in Colombo has criticized the Sri Lankan authorities for not adequately investigating the abduction of Tamils in the city (BBC 26 Sept. 2006; see also World Institute for Asian Studies 5 Sept. 2006). The CMC has similarly criticized the police (World Institute for Asian Studies 4 Nov. 2006). However, according to a 26 September 2006 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) article, the Sri Lankan police claimed that the families of the abducted had not provided sufficient information to allow them to properly investigate the abductions and that "Tamil activists [were] deliberately engaging in 'false propaganda' to malign them." The HRCSL reportedly informed the BBC that it would begin an enquiry into the abductions (BBC 26 Sept. 2006). No further information on investigations into the abductions of Tamils in Colombo could 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.

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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, Human Rights Watch (HRW), United Kingdom Home Office, United States Department of State.

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