



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Sri Lanka: Plantation Tamils; their number, location, relations with Sri Lankan Tamils, legal status and treatment by members of the government security forces and police (2004 - 2006)

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Plantation Tamils [also referred to as Upcountry Tamils (Refugees International 15 Sept. 2004; ICG 28 Nov. 2006, 1), hill Tamils, tea estate Tamils, and Indian Tamils (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5)] are the ancestors of Tamils who were brought from India by the British to work on tea plantations in Sri Lanka in the 19th century (UN 1 Oct. 2004; Refugees International 15 Sept. 2004). There are approximately one million plantation Tamils in Sri Lanka (*Ottawa Citizen* 20 Nov. 2006; US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5). According to 2005 and 2006 news sources, the ethnic group represents between five and six percent of Sri Lanka's population (*EIU* 17 July 2006; *PNG Post Courier* 17 Nov. 2005). Sri Lankan Tamils reportedly account for close to 13 percent of the country's population (*ibid.*).

Many plantation Tamils live in the plantation districts of Sri Lanka's central highlands (*Asia & Pacific Review World of Information* 29 Apr. 2006; UN 1 Oct. 2004). They also live on plantations in southern Sri Lanka (*ibid.*). According to Sri Lanka's 2001 Census of Population and Housing, the largest concentrations of plantation Tamils are found mainly on tea estates in the districts of Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Kandy, Ratnapura and Kegalle. In the capital city of Colombo, plantation Tamils account for just over one percent of the population (Sri Lanka 2001). Some plantation Tamils also live in the northern parts of Sri Lanka (Refugees International 15 Sept. 2004; see also UN 1 Oct. 2004).

According to a 20 November 2006 article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, which was written by a former high commissioner of India to Sri Lanka and of India to Canada, in the last century, "[t]here has been very little social interaction between [Sri Lankan] Tamils and Indian Tamils." In a 15 September 2004 article, Refugees International, a United States (US)-based organization that "generates lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for displaced people around the world and works to end the conditions that create displacement" (Refugees International n.d.), indicates that plantation Tamils who were displaced to northern, mainly Tamil-inhabited parts of Sri Lanka "were not accepted by other Tamils and had to live in fringe lands around local [Sri Lankan] Tamils." No further information on relations between plantation Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005*, "in the

past, approximately 300 thousand [plantation Tamils] did not qualify for citizenship in any country and faced discrimination" (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5). In 2003, Sri Lanka's parliament passed the Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act, allowing all persons of Indian origin who have lived in Sri Lanka since 30 October 1964, as well as their descendents, to obtain Sri Lankan citizenship (UN 1 Oct. 2004; Refugees International 15 Sept. 2004). Following the passing of the bill, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), designed a campaign to raise awareness of the new law (UN 1 Oct. 2004; see also US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5). According to the UNHCR, there were also 50 mobile clinics where people could obtain information and fill out forms to apply for passports, national identity cards (NICs), and other identity documents (1 Oct. 2004). *Country Reports 2005* notes that the UNCHR's 2004 awareness campaign led to the registration of about 276,000 people, but that 192,000 plantation Tamils remained unregistered (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 5).

In October 2004, the Sri Lankan parliament passed a bill requiring all Sri Lankan citizens to show their NIC when voting; however, the government allowed a one-year grace period as many Tamils, including those living in the hill country [or plantation Tamils], had reportedly not yet obtained their NICs (US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 3).

In a July 2005 interview with TamilNet, the leader of the political party Up-Country Peoples Front (UPF) suggested that the requirement to present documents, such as parents' birth certificates, could present a challenge to plantation Tamils wishing to obtain their citizenship (9 July 2005).

According to the article by Refugees International, plantation Tamils have long been marginalized in Sri Lanka and have lacked political power (15 Sept. 2004). *Country Reports 2005* notes that plantation Tamils, as well as Sri Lankan Tamils, have "suffered longstanding systemic discrimination in university education, government employment, and in other matters controlled by the government" (US 8 Mar. 2006).

On 4 December 2006, a TamilNet article reported that plantation Tamils working on tea estates were striking as part of ongoing actions to protest their low wages. According to the article, political observers have accused the Sri Lankan government of "ignoring the plight of workers who account for a significant fraction of Sri Lanka's export economy" (TamilNet 4 Dec. 2006). Citing the leader of the UPF, an earlier article by TamilNet indicates that the standard daily wage of tea estate workers is 180 Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR) [approximately CAD 1.90 (XE.com 5 Dec. 2006)], an amount considered to be insufficient to keep up with rising prices of essential commodities in Sri Lanka (9 July 2005).

### **Treatment by members of government security forces and police**

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate generally do not make the distinction between Sri Lankan Tamils and plantation Tamils. Specific reference to the treatment of plantation Tamils by members of the government security forces and police was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In June 2006, the government of Sri Lanka reportedly announced that Tamils living in the capital city and its suburbs, as well as Tamils in the 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.

According to 26 September 2006 correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of the UNCHR, the national identity card (NIC) is an essential document in government-controlled areas. Other sources consulted by the Research Directorate 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).

No further information on the treatment of plantation Tamils by members of the Sri Lankan security forces or the police 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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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) [Colombo] did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), United Kingdom Home Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), United States Department of State.

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