



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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23 November 2006

### LKA102019.E

Sri Lanka: Security controls at the airport in Colombo (2000 - 2006)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Bandaranaike International Airport [formerly Katunayake Airport (IAG n.d.)], located near the city of Colombo, is Sri Lanka's only international airport (ibid.; Aviation Sri Lanka n.d.).

According to a 22 March 2000 TamilNet news article, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Civil Aviation announced that, as of 27 March 2000, only passengers are permitted to enter the departure terminal at the Bandaranaike International Airport. Prior to this date, visitors were reportedly allowed to purchase entry tickets and accompany passengers through to the departure terminal lounge (TamilNet 22 Mar. 2000). According to the same article, Sri Lanka's international airport is "heavily defended by the Sri Lanka Air Force, Police and armed special security personnel" and "[a]ll vehicles and persons entering the airport are searched at two check points on the approach road" (ibid.).

In July 2001, Tamil Tiger rebels launched an attack on the Bandaranaike International Airport, killing 18 people and damaging 11 civilian and military airplanes (BBC 24 July 2001; see also *People's Daily Online* 5 Aug. 2001). Following the attacks, several security measures were reportedly implemented at the airport, including the pruning of vision-obstructing vegetation; the installation of double fencing around the airport perimeter; the installation of surveillance equipment and alarms; and the introduction of x-ray machines in the arrival lounge (*People's Daily Online* 5 Aug. 2001).

According to the 2001 United Kingdom (UK) Home Office *Fact-Finding Mission Report on Sri Lanka*, cited in the Department's September 2005 Country of Origin Information (COI) report on Sri Lanka,

[o]n entry to the terminal building all passengers have to show tickets and baggage [is] screened by X-ray machine. Since 22 March 2000, only passengers are allowed into the check-in area, which was screened off from the rest of the terminal ... This measure had gone some way to improving the situation and has halted the previous practice whereby agents could accompany passengers right up to the departure gate. (UK Sept. 2005, 75-76)

The same COI report also indicates that, during a 2002 visit to Sri Lanka, UK Home Office officials were told that "[i]t would be almost impossible to pass

through airport controls without having documents checked, as security is very tight" (ibid., 76).

According to a former assistant controller of Sri Lanka's Immigration and Emigration Department (IED), cited in a 25 June 2004 article in the Colombo-based *Daily News*, the Bandaranaike International Airport has "sophisticated equipment and ultraviolet scan[ner] to detect forged passports." In addition, authorized officers [officers at ports of entry and exit (IOM Dec. 2005-Jan. 2006)] at the airport are assigned identity numbers so that stamps in passports can be linked to the officer responsible for stamping the passport (*Daily News* 27 Jan. 2004).

In January 2004, *Daily News* reported that an authorized officer had been arrested for falsely providing an "arrival" stamp at the Bandaranaike International Airport (27 Jan. 2004). According to the article, Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) was investigating the possibility of a "racket where passports of some persons who have ... visas to certain countries are being used by others to smuggle themselves out to countries and send the passports back to the original holder [in Sri Lanka]" (*Daily News* 27 Jan. 2004).

A December 2005-January 2006 International Organization for Migration (IOM) update on Sri Lanka states that the IOM, in coordination with IED, provided authorized officers with training designed to improve border management. Training modules included document examination, computerized border control systems, visa procedures and endorsements (IOM Dec. 2005-Jan. 2006). The IOM update also notes that the IOM and the IED have developed new entry and exit stamps with "in-built security features and an individual number assigned for each immigration officer" (ibid.; see also *Daily News* 8 May 2006).

On 8 May 2006, *Daily News* reported that, between January and April 2006, the IED denied entry to 114 passengers at Bandaranaike International Airport. According to the article, the passengers were reportedly denied entry for carrying forged travel documents or for not carrying appropriate travel documents (*Daily News* 8 May 2006).

*Daily News* later reported that the IED had warned airlines operating out of the international airport not to allow passengers aboard their flights without proper travel documents (15 Sept. 2006). This announcement was made following the apparent suicide of a passenger placed in detention at Bandaranaike International Airport for travelling without proper identity documents (*Daily News* 15 Sept. 2006). According to *Daily News*, the airline on which the passenger had travelled had made arrangements with Airport and Aviation Services to have him detained at the airport "until he produced documents to prove his nationality and identity" (ibid.).

On 4 November 2006, the Sri Lankan government announced that construction of a second international airport in Weerawila [in southern Sri Lanka] would start on 19 November 2006. The government expects construction of the airport to be completed by 2009 (Sri Lanka 4 Nov. 2006). Information on security measures to be implemented at the country's new international airport 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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** International Organization for Migration (IOM) Sri Lanka, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, and the Refugee Council [UK] did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), Bandaranaike International Airport, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of Sri Lanka, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, GlobalSecurity.org, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group (ICG), Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka, Ministry of Ports and Aviation Sri Lanka, TamilNet, United Kingdom Home Office.

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