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Sri Lanka: Reports of forced removals of Tamils from Colombo after 7 June 2007
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

On 7 June 2007, Sri Lankan police and army officers conducted raids of several boarding houses and guest houses in predominantly Tamil areas of the capital city of Colombo (HRW Aug. 2007, 65; *ibid.* 8 June 2007; CPA 26 July 2007). Persons without "proper" identity documents or "valid" reasons for being in Colombo were forcibly removed from the lodges and placed on buses heading to the North and East of the country (ICG 14 June 2007, 15; *The Times* 8 June 2007). According to news and human rights sources consulted by the Research Directorate, close to 400 Tamils were evicted from the city (*ibid.*; ICG 14 June 2007, 15; HRW Aug. 2007, 65; BBC 7 June 2007). The expulsion of the Tamils from Colombo was reportedly part of an ongoing government effort to crack down on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the city (*ibid.*; HRW 7 June 2007; *The Times* 8 June 2007; VOA 9 June 2007; OANA 10 June 2007a). However, the incident was condemned within Sri Lanka as well as internationally (ICG 14 June 2007, 15; *The Times* 8 June 2007; AP 10 June 2007).

On 8 June 2007, in response to a fundamental rights application filed by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), a Sri Lankan advocacy group (CPA n.d.), the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka issued an "interim order" suspending any further evictions of Tamils from Colombo (*ibid.* 9 June 2007; TamilNet 8 June 2007). The interim order also directs authorities not to prevent Tamils from entering or staying in the city (*ibid.*; CPA 9 June 2007). The order is reportedly in effect until a final decision is made on the fundamental rights application (TamilNet 8 June 2007). A hearing on the application is scheduled for 28 November 2007 (CPA 26 July 2007).

Although a Sri Lankan government official initially claimed the Tamils "volunteered" to leave Colombo (*Daily News* 8 June 2007), on 10 June 2007, Sri Lanka's prime minister, Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, made a public apology for the actions taken against the Tamils and promised that such expulsions would not occur again (AP 10 June 2007; OANA 10 June 2007b; ICG 14 June 2007, 15). The country's president, Mahinda Rajapakse, called for an investigation into the actions of the authorities (AP 10 June 2007; see also BBC 8 June 2007). Reports of forced evictions of Tamils from Colombo occurring since 7 June 2007 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

News reports consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that close to 200 Tamils have returned to Colombo following their 7 June 2007 expulsion

(OANA 10 June 2007a; VOA 9 June 2007). The Sri Lankan government reportedly provided their transportation back to the city (ibid.; AP 9 June 2007; Indo-Asian News Service 26 July 2007). Those who did not return to Colombo are believed to have gone back to their hometowns (AP 10 June 2007; ibid. 9 June 2007).

Cited in a United Kingdom Home Office report, a 13 August 2007 letter from the British High Commission (BHC) in Colombo indicates that, as far as the BHC is aware, "all or nearly all [of the evicted Tamils] were returned following the decisive [8 June 2007] Supreme Court intervention" (UK 4 Sept. 2007, 146). Concerning the ease with which Tamils could return to Colombo by their own means (i.e., instead of being returned by the government following the Supreme Court decision), the BHC letter states that

[I]legally, everyone is entitled to travel to any part of the country - although in practice, the security forces are suspicious of any recently arrived Tamil who cannot give a "valid reason" for their presence. Travelling into Colombo is time consuming and intimidating for Tamils who come from the North and East. ... Tamils from the government controlled east and Jaffna travelling to Colombo will be photographed. If [they] are coming from LTTE controlled areas, [they] will be photographed and [their] details will be collected. (UK 4 Sept. 2007, 146)

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), Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) - Sri Lanka, *Daily News* [Colombo], European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Freedom House, Internal Displacement

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