



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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6 February 2009

### LKA103058.E

Sri Lanka: Travel pass systems for Tamils from northern and eastern Sri Lanka, including Jaffna and Trincomalee (2007 - January 2009)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The United States (US) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007* states that Tamils, especially residents of Jaffna, require special passes issued by security forces in order to travel in Sri Lanka (11 Mar. 2008, Sec.1d). A 7 November 2007 TamilNet article reports that new regulations were introduced for Tamils from northern and eastern provinces staying in Colombo for "urgent needs"; under the new regulations, Tamils are required to "register their presence" and bring letters from their regional Grama Sevaka (GS) [a village headman, appointed by the government through the Ministry of Home Affairs (Canada 14 Mar. 2008)] that state their reason for travel. The article also states that these regulations cause "severe difficulties" for Tamils visiting Colombo for medical appointments and for further travel abroad (TamilNet 7 Nov. 2007).

Additional TamilNet articles report on travel restrictions for Tamils from Jaffna during 2007 (7 Feb. 2007; 21 Mar. 2007). In a 7 February 2007 article, TamilNet reported that the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) restricted civilians wishing to travel out of Jaffna from staying overnight in areas where ship tickets are issued. The article also states that the registration of names for travel between the Kankesanthurai and Trincomalee ports was suspended (TamilNet 7 Feb. 2007). In a 21 March 2007 article, TamilNet reported that the SLA announced that all Jaffna civilians were to "provide a surety to stand guarantee for the return of the applicant as an additional requirement to obtain a pass to travel out of the district." Information on whether the need for a surety to exit Jaffna still exists could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In 2008, a team from the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre conducted a fact-finding mission to Jaffna and reported that there have been numerous restrictions imposed on civilian movement, "which vary from area to area and which require different approval letters and permits" (18 - 21 Feb. 2008, 7). The militarization of Jaffna has contributed to restrictions on mobility, since air and sea access to the peninsula can be closed "at any moment," and roads within the peninsula are closed on an "ad hoc basis" (CPA/INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre 18 - 21 Feb. 2008, 1). According to the fact-finding report, possession of a national identity card alone does not meet the identification document requirements for Tamils, especially in Jaffna; those who live in military-controlled areas are also issued identification cards by the military (ibid., 4). Tamil civilians travelling by air from Colombo to Jaffna may be required to provide more than standard

documentation, such as their police registration or a letter from their GS (ibid., 7).

A report published by South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka between January and June 2008 states the following about travel restrictions for Tamils:

The government imposed restrictions on people living in the districts of Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mannar and Mullaitivu travelling to the South. Civilians living in these areas will now be required to obtain a police pass if they wish to travel to Colombo, which will be issued upon submission of an application to the police stipulating the reason for travel, duration of stay, place of stay during the visit and intended date of return. (8)

The report further states that residents from these areas who are in the south without the permit "would be subject to interrogation and/or arrest" (SAHR Jan. - June 2008, 8).

Several TamilNet articles report on travel restrictions for Tamils from Jaffna during 2008 (9 July 2008; 15 July 2008; 30 July 2008). In a 9 July 2008 article, TamilNet reports on the temporary suspension of travel passes for Jaffna residents. The article further states that only residents over 60 years of age could receive passes and that senior government officials could travel without restrictions (TamilNet 9 July 2008). Information on how long the suspension of travel passes lasted could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Shortly after, in a 30 July 2008 article, TamilNet reported that the SLA further restricted travel out of the peninsula for Jaffna residents; the new regulations require residents to submit the addresses of where they would be staying outside of Jaffna and that these addresses would be "checked" by the Defence Ministry before travel passes would be issued. Those staying at addresses not approved by the Defence Ministry will reportedly face "drastic consequences" (TamilNet 30 July 2008). Additionally, the article reported that the distribution of "Special SLA Identity Cards to all persons in the peninsula between 13 and 60 years old is almost complete" (ibid.).

In a 15 July 2008 article, TamilNet published a letter written by Maavai Senathirajah, the Tamil National Alliance (TMA) member of parliament for the district of Jaffna, which addresses the "suppression of freedom of movement" created by the SLA travel pass system and requests its removal. The letter outlines travel pass requirements for residents of Jaffna, including the completion of approximately ten forms and the submission of recommendations from both the GS and the Divisional Secretary to the appropriate army camp (TamilNet 15 July 2008). The letter further states that it takes a "number of days" to receive the permit (ibid.).

The specific information found in the TamilNet articles could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Information on travel pass systems for Tamils in Trincomalee, specifically, 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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### References

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<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100620.htm>> [Accessed 14 Jan. 2009]

### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International, *Asian Survey*, Consortium of

Humanitarian Agencies, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily News* [Colombo], *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Forced Migration Review*, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Inter Agency Standing Committee, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), International Crisis Group, Minority Rights Group International, Norwegian Refugee Council, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations ReliefWeb.

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