



Australian Government

Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka – LKA37219 – Young single female Tamils – Colombo

16 August 2010

1. What is the current situation for young single female Tamils in Colombo?

No information was found on the current situation for young single female Tamils in Colombo.

In relation to the treatment of women, sources report that violence against women is widespread in Sri Lanka. Laws outlawing such violence are not effectively enforced. It was reported that, in Colombo, women with a Vanni national identity card may be targeted. Tamils in Colombo, which could include young single females, may be harassed by the police or at army checkpoints. Male Tamils from Sri Lanka's north and east, however, may be subject to closer scrutiny.

Broadly, on protection under refugee criteria or under complementary protection, the UNHCR's most recent eligibility guidelines for Sri Lanka, dated 5 July 2010, state:

...Given the cessation of hostilities, Sri Lankans originating from the north of the country are no longer in need of international protection under broader refugee criteria or complementary forms of protection solely on the basis of risk of indiscriminate harm. In light of the improved human rights and security situation in Sri Lanka, there is no longer a need for group-based protection mechanisms or for a presumption of eligibility for Sri Lankans of Tamil ethnicity originating from the north of the country. It is important to bear in mind that the situation is still evolving, which has made the drafting of these Guidelines particularly complex.¹

More specifically, in respect of women potentially at risk, the UNHCR's guidelines noted that despite the cessation of hostilities, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in conflict regions are still reported. In addition, legal provisions outlawing rape and other forms of violence against women are reportedly not effectively enforced – partly due to lack of awareness, widespread under-reporting and the low priority given to such cases by the police and judiciary.²

In 2010, the US Department of State also reported that the law prohibiting rape was not effectively enforced throughout 2009. It noted that sexual assault and rape were

¹ UNHCR 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Sri Lanka*, 5 July, p.1 – Attachment 1.

² UNHCR 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Sri Lanka*, 5 July, p.7 – Attachment 1.

“pervasive societal problems”. It also stated that although sexual harassment was a criminal offence enforcement of the law was not widespread.³

According to the UNHCR’s July 2010 guidelines, Tamils in Colombo are reportedly frequently harassed at army checkpoints. Police are said to have refused registration in Colombo to Tamils from the country’s north and east. It was reported that persons who were arrested in cordon and search operations were mainly Tamils from Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu as well as other places in Vanni and to some extent Tricomalee. Also, women with a Vanni national identity card were said to be targeted.⁴

Similarly, the UK Home Office, in February 2010, reported that Tamils in Colombo may be harassed and told that it was not safe to stay in the capital.⁵ A Sri Lankan Member of Parliament stated that Tamils in Colombo were directly or indirectly intimidated by the police:

“Mano Ganesan MP said people could stay as long as they complied with police registration, but that the police always directly or indirectly intimidated Tamils, often in order to get money from them. He was of the opinion that it was not advisable for Tamils who did not originate from Colombo to stay there.”⁶

On the matter of the internal flight or relocation in Colombo, the UNHCR did not refer to young single female Tamils, but did note that young Tamil men from the country’s north and east might meet with closer scrutiny during the police registration process and in some cases a residence permit may be refused.⁷

Attachments

1. UNHCR 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Sri Lanka*, 5 July.
2. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Sri Lanka*, 11 March.
3. UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report: Sri Lanka*, 18 February.

³ US Department of State 2010, ‘Women’ in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Sri Lanka*, 11 March – Attachment 2.

⁴ UNHCR 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Sri Lanka*, 5 July, p.5/footnote 35 – Attachment 1.

⁵ UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report: Sri Lanka*, 18 February, p.162/para. 28.10 – Attachment 3.

⁶ UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report: Sri Lanka*, 18 February, p.162/para. 28.10 – Attachment 3.

⁷ UNHCR 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Sri Lanka*, 5 July, p.10 – Attachment 1.