

**Migration Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

MRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: LKA35247
Country: Sri Lanka
Date: 31 July 2009

Keywords: Sri Lanka – Update on situation for Tamils in Negombo

Questions

1. Please provide information about the current situation for Tamils in Negombo?

RESPONSE

Note: Location of Negombo

A map of Sri Lanka can be found on page 39 of the latest UNHCR guidelines on Sri Lanka. This shows Negombo as located on the west coast, about 30 kms north of Colombo (Attachment 1). Negombo is in Gampaha district (Attachment 2); according to UK Home Office country information, Gampaha district has a high concentration of Tamil and Sinhalese populations (Attachment 3) (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, 'UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka', UNHCR website, April, pp. 13-14
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de0b6b2.html> – Accessed 15 April – Attachment 1; Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka 2001, 'Census of Population and Housing 2001 – Population by Sex, Age (Under 18 years and 18 years & over) according to Urban Area (Provisional)', Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka website
<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/census2001/population/district/t002a.htm> – Accessed 23 February 2006 – Attachment 2; UK Home Office 2009, *Country of Origin Information Report: Sri Lanka*, June, Section 20.07 – Attachment 3).

1. Please provide information about the current situation for Tamils in Negombo?

Information was not found on the current situation for Tamils in Negombo specifically. A few articles were found on the pro-Tamil website *TamilNet* reporting police checks and arrests of Tamils in Negombo between March and May this year. These are set out below. Since the conclusion of the war no reports on Tamils in Negombo were found in a search of the available information.

Most of the reportage on the situation for Tamils in Sri Lanka since the end of the conflict focuses on the north and east of the country. A few recent media articles were found reporting on the situation for Tamil communities in the west. An article dated 18 July 2009 in *The National* reports on the situation for Tamils living in Wellawatte (south of Colombo). This may be relevant in that it describes a situation where Sinhalese and Tamils live “side by side in a state of amity” but also details the fears held by some Tamils in the community despite the end of the war:

Mr Fernando, like many other Sinhalese in the town, insists there has never been any animosity towards his Tamil compatriots, even when the rebels set off deadly suicide bombs in the city during the war.

Bandula Sirimanna, a veteran Sinhalese journalist, says the two communities have lived peacefully for many years...

...After the war ended in May, there was passionate celebrations by the Sinhalese over the end of the [Tamil Tiger rebels] but Tamil residents were not harmed,” he said.

It is nearly two months since the government declared the war against the Tigers over, having killed their elusive leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, among the world’s most wanted men, and rounded up most of the remaining rebels.

This should have been a cause for celebration for Tamils such as Maheswari, who initially backed the rebels’ call for a separate homeland for Tamils but were later disillusioned by the prolonged fighting, hot-headedness and intransigence of the insurgents during the two or three rounds of peace talks with the government.

Yet for Maheswari, and other Tamils in Wellawatte who refused to give their names out of fear, the future is still uncertain.

Some say they still fear both the security forces, known to randomly round up and detain Tamils, and the remnants of the Tamil militia. Because of this residents are reluctant to speak openly or be photographed.

“There are government agents all over because of the belief that there could be Tigers hiding out here,” said a young Tamil manager of a computer store (Samath, F. 2009, ‘After war, peaceful Tamils long for daily tensions to end’, *The National*, 18 July <http://www.thenational.lk/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090718/FOREIGN/707179745/1103/NEWS> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 4).

Similarly, a *New York Times* article dated 21 May 2009 looks at the situation for those living in Colombo’s Tamil enclaves. The article details the situation for the Tamil community in Wellawatte:

Unlike the majority Sinhalese, who are Buddhist, the Tamils here must report periodically to the police and carry identification papers stating the names of people allowed to live at a particular address.

“The police visit my place every two weeks,” said S. Krishnamoorthy, 27, another worker at the drugstore. “Now that the war is over, we hope that we will be more free to live in Colombo and to travel inside Sri Lanka” (‘Sri Lanka’s Tamils Voice Misgivings’ 2009, *New York Times*, 21 May http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/world/asia/21lanka.html?_r=2 – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 5).

After the government declared victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a 25 May 2009 article on the *Tamil Affairs* website reported that: “News reaching from various parts of Colombo and its suburbs confirm a campaign of systematic harassment is been let loose by the pro-government mobs against the Tamil civilian population” (Jayadevan, R. 2009, ‘Tamils live in fear in Colombo’, *Tamil Affairs*, 25 May <http://tamilaffairs.com/featured/tamils-live-in-fear-in-colombo> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 6).

A 4 June 2009 *Hindu* article reports that at a Victory Day parade held on 3 June to mark the end of what is called “Eelam War IV”, the President declared that: “It is now the time to win over the hearts of the Tamil people”. Further, he stated that “the Tamil speaking people should be protected” and that “[t]hey should be able to live without fear and mistrust. That is today the responsibility of us all” (Reddy, M. 2009, ‘Time to win over Tamil hearts’, *The Hindu*, 4 June <http://www.hindu.com/2009/06/04/stories/2009060459761300.htm> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 7).

For an overview and background of the situation for Tamils in Sri Lanka generally, see Section 20 of the UK Home Office country information report on Sri Lanka (UK Home Office 2009, *Country of Origin Information Report: Sri Lanka*, June, Section 20 – Attachment 3).

***TamilNet* articles**

The pro-Tamil website *TamilNet* has a few reports of incidents involving Tamils in Negombo in 2009; no reports of such incidents since May were found.

The most recent article is dated 23 May 2009 and reports that Tamils in Negombo were harassed by “Sinhala hoodlums” during the celebrations held to mark the defeat of the LTTE:

Tamil residents in Negombo are reported being harassed by Sinhala hoodlums during the ‘Victory Celebration’ held Friday to mark the defeat of LTTE in the war front. Sinhalese youths had visited Tamil houses to demand money under threat to help fund the celebration, and those who declined to give were harassed and in some cases assaulted, media sources said.

Sinhala hoodlums marching in procession celebrating the victory had thrown rotten eggs and spoilt vegetables targeting Tamils who walk along the roads.

In one instance a Tamil youth who was on his way home along Beach Road in Negombo was severely assaulted by goons saying this was the treatment for Tamils in future, sources said (‘Sinhala hoodlums harass Tamils in Negombo’ 2009, *TamilNet*, 23 May <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29437> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 8).

Four *TamilNet* articles report on police checks and arrests of Tamils in areas around Colombo including Negombo between March and May this year:

- ‘SLA, Police arrest 75 Tamil civilians in Colombo’ 2009, *TamilNet*, 8 May <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29294> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 9;
- ‘17 Tamil youths arrested in Colombo on May Day’ 2009, *TamilNet*, 1 May <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29238> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 10;
- ‘16 Tamil youths arrested in the suburbs of Colombo’ 2009, *TamilNet*, 21 April <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29122> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 11;
- ‘5 Tamil youths arrested in Colombo’ 2009, *TamilNet*, 16 March <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=28732> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 12.

Negombo Tamils

A 23 May 2009 article in *The Hindu Business Line* details the various distinct Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. According to this article, one such group is the “Negombo Tamils, who live in the western part, and have been assimilated into the Sinhala community”:

The Tamil community of Sri Lanka, around 18 per cent of the population, is far from homogenous. It is mostly Hindus, with some Christians. The Tamils descended from the ancient kingdom of Jaffna form the bulk, some 1.8 million, and are concentrated in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country.

The Indian Tamils, the other group, some 8,00,000 in number, are descendants of indentured plantation workers who came in the 19th and 20th centuries and live in the central highlands. Other groups are the Negombo Tamils, who live in the western part, and have been assimilated into the Sinhala community (Balakrishnan, B. 2009, ‘Sri Lanka: Moving beyond conflict’, *Hindu Business Line*, 23 May <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2009/05/23/stories/2009052350030800.htm> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 13).

A November 2007 article on the Sri Lanka news forum website *Lanka Newspapers* provides information on Negombo Tamils. This states that “Negombo Tamils or Puttalam Tamils is a term usually used for native Sri Lankan Tamils who live in the western Gampaha and Puttalam districts of Sri Lanka. It does not apply to Tamil immigrants from other parts of Island into these districts... The main feature of the Negombo Tamils is the continuing process of assimilation into the majority Sinhalese ethnic group known as Sinhalisation” (Researcher Note: it should be kept in mind that this information was found on a public news forum, and its authoritativeness is not guaranteed) (‘Negombo Tamils and their assimilation into the Sinhalese race’ 2007, LankaNewspapers.com, 30 November http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2007/11/21998_space.html – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 14).

A September 2008 *World Socialist Website* article indicates that there is also a large population of displaced Tamils from the north and east living in Negombo (Ratnayake, K. 2008, ‘Sri Lankan police detain SEP member for over a week’, *World Socialist Web Site*, 23 September <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/sep2008/sril-s23.shtml> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 15).

Security generally

The US Department of State issued an updated travel warning for Sri Lanka on 26 June 2009. This states: “[a]lthough no terrorist incidents have taken place since the government’s declaration of military victory over the LTTE in May 2009, there remains the possibility that remnants of the organisation may attempt to carry out attacks” (‘Travel Warning: Sri Lanka’ 2009, US Department of State website, updated 26 June http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_3011.html# – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 16; see also: ‘Sri Lanka travel advice’ 2009, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office website, updated 2 July <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/sri-lanka#> – Accessed 30 July 2009 – Attachment 17).

The latest UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka provides details of the situation, especially for Tamils, in and around Colombo. It should be noted that the guidelines were released in April 2009, prior to the SLA claiming victory over the LTTE in May 2009 (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, ‘UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka’, UNHCR website, April, pp. 13-14 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de0b6b2.html> – Accessed 15 April – Attachment 1).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <http://www.google.com/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, ‘UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka’, UNHCR website, April <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de0b6b2.html> – Accessed 15 April.
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<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29294> – Accessed 30 July 2009.
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17. 'Sri Lanka travel advice' 2009, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office website, updated 2 July
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/sri-lanka#> – Accessed 30 July 2009.