

SRI LANKA ASSESSMENT

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Country Information and Policy Unit

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1 SCOPE OF DOCUMENT

1.1 This assessment has been produced by the Country Information and Policy Unit, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office, from information obtained from a variety of sources.

1.2 The assessment has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum determination process. The information it contains is not exhaustive, nor is it intended to catalogue all human rights violations. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum claims made in the United Kingdom.

1.3 The assessment is sourced throughout. It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain.

1.4 It is intended to revise the assessment on a 6-monthly basis while the country remains within the top 35 asylum producing countries in the United Kingdom.

1.5 An electronic copy of the assessment has been made available to the following organisations:

Amnesty International UK

Immigration Advisory Service

Immigration Appellate Authority

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

JUSTICE

Medical Foundation for the care of Victims of Torture

Refugee Council

Refugee Legal Centre

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

2 GEOGRAPHY

2.1 The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, lies in the Indian Ocean, south of India. The country covers an area of 65,610 square kilometres. It has a population of 19,144,875 (July 1999 estimate). The capital is Colombo. [30] Other principal towns include Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, Moratuwa, Jaffna, Kotte, Kandy and Galle. [1]

2.2 The population can be divided into the majority Sinhalese (74%), Tamils (18%), Muslims (7%) and Burghers, the descendants of colonialists (1%). The majority (69%) are Buddhist, 16% are Hindu, 8% are Christian, and 7% are Muslims. [6c]

2.3 Three languages are spoken: Sinhala, Tamil and English. [6c] Tamil was made the second official language in 1988. [1] Almost all Sinhalese are Buddhist and speak Sinhala; Tamils are mostly Hindu and speak Tamil. They are comprised of those Tamils who have a long history on the island, and "up-country" Tamils (roughly 30% of all Tamils) who are descendants of labourers brought from southern India to work on the plantations. Muslims speak mostly Tamil, but are distinguished by their religion. [6c]

2.4 In most of the country the Sinhalese form the majority. Tamils are the largest community in the northern districts. "Up-country" Tamils live mainly in the hill country in the central part of Sri Lanka. In the east, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are equally represented. In the rest of the country, there are substantial Tamil and Muslim communities, although they are in the minority there. [6c]

Economy

2.5 Sri Lanka is a low-income country with a market economy based mainly on the export of textiles, tea, rubber, coconuts, and gems. It also earns substantial foreign exchange from

the repatriated earnings of citizens employed abroad, and from tourism. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is approximately \$850 (79,617 rupees). Real GDP growth was 6 percent in 2000. Growth during 2001 was forecast at about 1 percent. This decline is attributed mainly to the worldwide economic downturn, the July 2001 LTTE attack on Colombo's international airport, and prolonged power outages throughout the country from July 2001 onward. [2e]

2.6 Minimum wage rates average approximately 2,682 rupees per month in industry, commerce, and the service sector, and approximately 114 rupees per day in agriculture. The minimum wage in the garment industry is 1,200 rupees per month. These minimum wages are insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and the standard family of five, but the vast majority of families have more than one breadwinner. [2e] The approximate rate of exchange on 13 April 2002 was £1 = 137 Sri Lankan rupees. [33]

2.7 Most permanent full-time workers are covered by laws that prohibit them from regularly working more than 45 hours per week (a 5 1/2-day workweek). Such workers also receive 14 days of annual leave, 14 to 21 days of medical leave, and approximately 20 local holidays each year. Maternity leave is available for permanent and seasonal or part-time female workers. Several laws protect the safety and health of industrial workers, but the Ministry of Labour's small staff of inspectors is inadequate to enforce compliance with the laws. Workers have the statutory right to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health, but many workers are unaware of, or indifferent to, health risks, and fear that they would lose their jobs if they removed themselves. [2e]

For further information on Geography, refer to Europa Year Book, source [1]

3 HISTORY

Independence to 1994

3.1. The former British colony of Ceylon achieved independence in February 1948. Under the Constitution of 1972 the country became a republic with the name of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The government was headed by a Prime Minister accountable to a unicameral parliament. In 1978 a presidential system was introduced, with extensive executive powers being held by the president. [14a]

3.2 Since independence, the political situation in Sri Lanka has been characterised by the conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. Before independence, Burghers played an important role in the British administration, as did many Tamils because of their knowledge of English. After independence the various communities were able to work together. However the Ceylon Citizenship Act 1948 withheld nationality from up-country Tamils, who had come to Sri Lanka only relatively recently in its history, having been brought over from India by the British. [14a] An amendment to the Parliamentary Elections (Order in Council) 1949 removed the franchise rights of these Tamils. [19]

3.3 For Tamils, the political situation changed in 1956, when Solomon Bandaranaike set himself up as a champion of Sinhalese interests and won the elections with a promise to make Sinhalese the country's only official language, instead of English. [14a] The Official

Language Act was duly passed in 1956. [19]

3.4 While the 1978 Constitution recognised Tamil as a "national language" for public administration and the conduct of legal proceedings, Tamils continued to feel discriminated against as a result of the restrictive admissions policy applied to them for university places and public office. Nothing subsequently came of the promise under the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact to set up regional councils with powers of their own. [14a]

3.5 In Jaffna the situation deteriorated. In 1976, extremists, the Young Tigers, murdered the Tamil mayor of Jaffna, who had been working with the government. [14a]

3.6 Communal disturbances between Sinhalese and Tamils led to the imposition of a state of emergency in the north for 5 days in June 1981, and throughout the country from August 1981 to January 1982. [1]

3.7 In July 1983, 13 Sinhalese soldiers were killed near Jaffna, reportedly by a group of Tamil extremists. Violence directed against the Tamil minority started immediately in Colombo, subsequently spreading throughout the country. Several hundred Tamils were killed by Sinhalese groups. In the following few days there were reports that unarmed members of the Tamil minority were being killed at random by the security forces in the north, apparently in retaliation for the killing of their own men, and that Tamil detainees held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) were being killed in a Colombo prison. Later that year, the Sri Lankan Government acknowledged 51 killings. [4a] Between July 1983 and July 1985 nearly 100,000 Tamils fled to southern India, where some of them were housed in camps. [14a]

3.8 The Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, tried to bring about a settlement between the Sri Lankan Government and the various warring groups in the north, but Gandhi's devolution proposals were rejected at a conference in Bangalore in 1986 by the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran, who returned to Jaffna and stepped up operations against the Sri Lankan army. In 1987 the Sri Lankan army launched an offensive, Operation Liberation, to regain military control of the Jaffna Peninsula. [14a]

3.9 Instances of human rights violations by the Sri Lankan security forces were reported such as the massacre of 150 civilians, nearly all Tamils, who were killed by the Special Task Force (STF) after 13 STF personnel had been killed at Kokkaddicholai in January 1987. Between 1983 and the 1987 signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, 685 disappearances were recorded in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. [4b]

3.10 India once again resolved to mediate and the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 29 July 1987 was concluded between the Sri Lankan President, Junius Jayawardene, and Rajiv Gandhi. The peace plan included provision for the amalgamation of provincial councils in the north and east and for the repatriation of the 100,000 Tamils who had fled to India after the events of 1983. As part of the plan, an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was despatched to the Jaffna Peninsula to oversee compliance with the provisions of the peace agreement. However the LTTE refused to disarm and fighting broke out. [14a]

3.11 On 25 March 1990 the IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka. The LTTE held control of most of the Jaffna peninsula, and the army held an area in the north around Palaly and Kankesanthurai. [14a] In the early 1990s there were several incidents of the security force responding to LTTE attacks by committing human rights violations against the Tamil civilian

population. For instance in June 1991, at least 67 civilians were killed in the villages of Mahiladithivu and Muthalaikuda after 2 soldiers had been killed in a land mine explosion nearby. [4c] In August 1992, the day after 10 senior army and navy officers had been killed by the LTTE on Kayts Island, soldiers from Poonani camp killed 39 Tamils in Mailanthanai, Batticaloa district, over 180 miles away, apparently in reprisal. [4d]

1994 to the present

3.12 The People's Alliance (PA), led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of Chandrika Kumaratunga, won the 1994 parliamentary elections. This ended the 17-year rule of the United National Party. Mrs Kumaratunga was appointed Prime Minister. [1]

3.13 Presidential elections were held on 9 November 1994, which were won by Mrs Kumaratunga. The new President promised to abolish the executive presidency and to implement a programme of social, economic and constitutional change. The President's mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike was appointed Prime Minister, the third time she had held that office. [1]

3.14 In the run up to the elections, Mrs Kumaratunga promised to bring peace by seeking a political solution to the Tamil conflict. In the autumn of 1994 talks were held with the LTTE, which led to a military truce on 8 January 1995. The LTTE unilaterally ended the truce in April 1995 and full-scale war broke out again in the north and east. [14a]

3.15 In July 1995, the Government launched a major military offensive, named "Operation Leap Forward", in the Jaffna peninsula. This was intensified in mid-October 1995 (under the code name "Operation Riviresa" [Sunshine]), and many thousands of civilians were forcefully exorted by the LTTE to leave the area. In retaliation for the army's offensive in the Jaffna peninsula, the LTTE carried out bomb attacks on the country's two largest oil storage facilities near Colombo in October 1995. In mid-November 1995, two LTTE suicide bombers caused 18 deaths and more than 50 casualties in Colombo. [1]

3.16 In October 1995 the army launched an offensive, as a result of which it seized control of the town of Jaffna on 5 December 1995. In May 1996 the army took control of most of the Jaffna peninsula. In the Eastern Province the army retained control of the coastal strip, while the jungle areas behind the lagoons remained largely LTTE territory. [14a]

3.17 The LTTE rejected the President's offer of an amnesty in exchange for disarmament. The retaking of the city of Jaffna precipitated an escalation in LTTE-organised terrorist activity. At the end of January 1996 100 people were killed and about 1,400 were injured as a result of a suicide bomb attack on the Central Bank in Colombo. This devastating attack appeared to be the LTTE's response to the Government's release of the legal draft of the devolution proposals earlier that month. [1]

3.18 In early April 1996, against a background of continuing conflict between Tamil militants and government forces in the north and east of the country, the President extended the state of emergency to cover the whole of the country (since coming to power in November 1994, the People's Alliance administration had restricted the emergency provisions to the troubled northern and eastern regions, and Colombo). The opposition condemned this move as an attempt on the part of the Government to postpone crucial local elections due to be held later that year. [1]

3.19 In mid-May 1996, the Sri Lankan army announced that it now controlled the whole of the Jaffna peninsula. It also claimed that of the 300,000 Tamil civilians who had been displaced by the ethnic violence, about 250,000 had returned to government-held areas. On 4 July 1996 a suicide bomb attack in the centre of Jaffna, which killed over 25 people and injured 60, including the Housing Minister, again demonstrated the ability of the LTTE suicide commandos to wreak havoc. The LTTE was also reported to have conducted public executions of suspected informers and to have engaged in massacres and retaliatory killings of Sinhalese and Muslim villagers, torture and mistreatment of prisoners, forced conscription of children, and kidnapping. [1] & [16a]

3.20 In July 1996 the LTTE was suspected of planting a bomb on a crowded suburban train near Colombo which killed more than 70 people, and injured 500. In October 1996 the Government took legal action for the first time against the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, who along with nine other militants, was charged with more than 700 criminal acts of terrorism. [1]

3.21 In March 1997 the PA Government was successful in local elections in which it won more than 80% of the contested councils. Voting did not take place in the northern and eastern provinces. However the PA Government's share of the total vote decreased to 48%, compared to the 62% it achieved in the November 1994 Presidential election. [1]

3.22 In March 1997 the members of the Human Rights Commission were appointed, 8 months after the Act establishing the HRC was passed in Parliament. In late June 1997, the Government announced that the function of monitoring the welfare of detainees which had until then been entrusted to the Human Rights Task Force would be transferred to the HRC as of 1 July 1997. [3b]

3.23 In May 1997 the Government launched Operation Jayasikuru (Sure of Victory), with the aim of gaining control of the 75 km highway between Elephant Pass, the point of entry to the Jaffna Peninsula, and Vavuniya. [1]

3.24 On 26 January 1998 the Government formally outlawed the LTTE, the day after an LTTE suicide squad crashed a truck through road blocks in the ancient capital of Kandy and set off a bomb outside the Temple of the Tooth (Dalada Maligawa), the country's holiest Buddhist shrine. A total of 13 were killed and 23 wounded in the attack, which occurred days before the 50th anniversary celebrations of Sri Lanka's independence, which were to be held in the city. [7c]

3.25 LTTE violence continued. In early February 1998, 9 people were killed in Colombo as a result of another suicide bombing, and the following month 38 people died and about 250 were injured when a suspected LTTE suicide bomber drove a bus laden with explosives into the capital's crowded business district. [1]

3.26 Elections for local councils in the areas recaptured from the LTTE were held on 29 January 1998. Four Tamil parties, EPDP, PLOTE, EPRLF and TELO, who in the past had all fought against the Sri Lankan Army, as well as the moderate TULF, contested the elections. The governing PA and the opposition UNP did not participate, and the LTTE boycotted the elections. The EPDP won the largest number of seats though only some 28% of the registered voters participated in the election. [7d], [7e] & [9a]

3.27 On 12 March 1998, Sarojini Yogeswaram of TULF was sworn in as the first mayor of Jaffna since 1984 [7j] but she was assassinated in May 1998. The Sangilliyar Force claimed responsibility. [7k] The new mayor, P Sivapalan, was himself killed in a bomb explosion in the Jaffna municipality office on 11 September 1998. The local army commander and several senior police officers were also killed in the blast. [7l]

3.28 On 4 August 1998 the Government extended the State of Emergency to the whole island for a period of one month. [7m] The Emergency had been lifted in the south of Sri Lanka in July 1997. [3b] Parliament is required to vote to extend any State of Emergency each month. Later that day the President announced that the provincial council elections scheduled for 28 August 1998 were postponed, as the army could not provide security to candidates and polling stations, when the war against the LTTE was at a decisive stage. [7n]

3.29 At the end of September 1998 the Sri Lankan army lost the key northern town of Kilinochchi to the LTTE in fierce fighting which left many hundreds dead. However the army captured the tactically more important town of Mankulam. [8j]

3.30 The Defence Ministry announced at the beginning of December 1998 that Operation Jayasikuru, launched in May 1997, had been completed. Analysts have said that the Operation, during which thousands of soldiers and rebels had been killed or wounded, was one of the bloodiest in the civil war. A fresh offensive was launched, codenamed Rivi Bala (Sun Power), after the capture of the northern towns of Omanthai, Puliyanikulam and Mankulam. The new offensive linked up the key towns of Mankulam, Oddusuddan and Nedunkerni in what was seen as a change of the Government's military strategy to inch closer to the LTTE base in the north eastern coastal town of Mullaitivu. [8i]

3.31 Provincial elections in the North West Province were held on 25 January 1999. The People's Alliance coalition won 30 of the 52 seats, while the opposition UNP took 19 and the People's Liberation Front (the JVP) won 3 seats. The election was accompanied by unprecedented levels of violence in which 2 people were killed and hundreds injured. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) said that some 125 complaints of election violence had been reported and estimated that opposition polling agents had been chased away from around 75% of the polling stations. Election officers, monitors and opposition parties also complained of attacks on polling stations, vote rigging and intimidation. [8h]

3.32 The Supreme Court ruled on 27 January 1999 that the President's decision to postpone provincial elections under the Emergency Regulations in August 1998 was unconstitutional. The Election Commissioner was also wrong to have agreed to the delays. Elections for the Western, Central, North Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provincial Councils were to be held on 1 April 1999 [8f], but were postponed for 5 days. The ruling PA narrowly won the 5 councils. There were some incidents of assault, intimidation and electoral malpractices during the polling. [7p] Elections to the Southern Provincial Council were held on 10 June 1999, and were won by the PA, although they fell short of a majority. The JVP won 7 of the 55 seats. [8n]

3.33 On 4 March 1999, the Sri Lankan Army launched a new offensive in the north, codenamed Operation Rana Gosa (Battle Cry), the first offensive of the year. The objective was to expand the area controlled by the security forces in the Vanni region. The army quickly recaptured some 535 square kilometres of territory formerly held by the LTTE. [7b] A

further 325 square kilometres were recaptured later that month, including the town of Madhu, a Catholic pilgrimage town. [7i] In May 1999 the Sri Lankan army recaptured a further 102 square kilometres from the Tamil Tigers in the north western Mannar district. [8k]

3.34 After a period of relative calm at the beginning 1999, the LTTE began a long series of attacks, killing close to 100 civilians, including moderate Tamil politician Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam. Tiruchelvam was the founder of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies and the Law and Society Trust, a human rights research and advocacy organisation. On 18 September 1999, the LTTE killed more than 50 civilians with machetes close to Amparai. This attack was allegedly in retaliation for the airforce bombing of Puthukkudiyiruppu. see paragraph 3.35 During 1999, at least 14 people were found guilty of offences by the LTTE's self-described courts, killed by public execution, and their bodies tied to lamp posts or otherwise left for public display. [2c]

3.35 In September 1999 an air force bombing of Puthukkudiyiruppu in the Vanni killed over 22 civilians. The Government held an investigation and authorised compensation for the victims' families. [2e] In November 1999 at least 37 civilians were killed in fighting at the Madhu Church during an exchange of shelling between Sri Lankan army and LTTE troops. About 3,000 internally displaced persons sought shelter at the church a few days before, as the fighting escalated. The circumstances of the shelling remain unclear. However, both the government forces and the LTTE knew that civilians were inside the church. [2c]

3.36 In November 1999, unknown assailants killed Ramesh Nadarajah, a Tamil Member of Parliament for the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and editor of a weekly Tamil-language newspaper. [2e]

3.37 In November 1999 the LTTE counter-attacked and erased most of the government's military gains. [2e]

3.38 On 18 December 1999, shortly before Presidential elections, a woman suicide bomber detonated explosives strapped to her body at an election rally. The attack, which killed 21 people and injured 110, occurred shortly after President Kumaratunga had delivered a speech. The President suffered facial injuries from shrapnel, and it was later reported that she had been blinded in her right eye. Almost simultaneously a bomb at a rally elsewhere in Colombo, addressed by opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, killed 12 people and injured 70. There was no claim of responsibility for either bombing, but both were widely assumed to have been the work of the LTTE. [23a]

3.39 Three days later, President Kumaratunga was re-elected, after securing 51.12% of the vote for the People's Alliance. Her nearest rival was Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party, with 42.71%. M.D. Nandana Gunathilaka of the People's Liberation Front received 4.08%. The election commissioner D.M. Dassanayake said that the turnout was 73.31% of the country's 11.77 million eligible voters, and that the conduct of the polling had been generally fair despite some 500 complaints of fraud. [23a] & [24]

3.40 An unknown gunman assassinated Kumar Ponnambalam, a prominent Tamil politician, in January 2000. No group initially claimed responsibility, but Ponnambalam was known to openly support the Tamil Tiger rebels. His death came shortly after a suicide bomb attack outside the Prime Minister's office in Colombo. [21a] The attack, which killed 13 people, resulted in the arrest of hundreds of Tamil suspects, and the imposition of an all-night

curfew in Colombo. [21e]

3.41 Despite efforts at brokering peace talks, the violence continued. On 27 January 2000, a bomb ripped through a post office in Vavuniya, killing at least 11 people and injuring 33. [25a] Then on 10 March 2000, an attempt to ambush a ministerial motorcade resulted in a gun battle between rebels and police that left 23 people dead and 80 injured. Amnesty International accused the LTTE of shooting indiscriminately. [21f] On 7 June 2000, Industry Minister CV Gooneratne was assassinated by a suicide bomber in Colombo. [21m] The attack, in which 21 others died, [21n] took place during celebrations honouring the country's war heroes. [21m] President Kumaratunga immediately called for restraint. Although there were reports of sporadic violence, the State media announced that anyone trying to provoke a backlash against Tamils would be severely punished. [21n] A further suicide bombing occurred on 15 September 2000. At least 8 people were killed and 21 others wounded in the blast outside an eye hospital in Colombo. [25h] Violence increased the following month, ahead of parliamentary elections. On 2 October 2000, a suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber killed 24 people, including a ruling party candidate, at a rally in the north east of the country. Three days later, a bomb attack at an election rally by the ruling party in the town of Medawachchi took the lives of 11 people. [21d]

3.42 Fierce fighting again broke out in March 2000 between government troops and Tamil rebels. K. Shanmuganathan, the highest-ranking civil official in the Jaffna peninsula, said more than 12,500 civilians living near the Elephant Pass causeway were trapped as they tried to flee the fighting. [25b]

3.43 The forces of the LTTE inflicted one of the worst defeats of the civil war on 22 April 2000 when they forced the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) to retreat from the heavily fortified Elephant Pass base which commanded the narrow isthmus providing the only land route into the Jaffna peninsula. The SLA withdrew some 17,000 troops northwards from Elephant Pass and the nearby Yakachchi base after a two-day assault by LTTE fighters. LTTE forces continued their advance towards Jaffna City, and on 30 April 2000 captured the town of Pallai, some 15 km north of Elephant Pass. [23b] The rebels continued to push north, and by the middle of May 2000 the Sri Lankan Government admitted that its troops had been forced back on the outskirts of Jaffna. [21i] The Sri Lankan military contained the push, with newly acquired weapons, and there followed a lull in the fighting. The SLA then went on the offensive: a rebel position in the northern Jaffna peninsula was attacked and destroyed on 5 July 2000, killing at least 23 militants according to a government spokesman. [25c] Tamil Tiger rebels later admitted that they had lost 35 fighters, in the insurgents' worst defeat in three months. Independent confirmation of the battle situation could not be determined since neither side allowed journalists into the zone of fighting. [25d] A further lull in fighting followed, before in early September 2000, the Sri Lankan military pushed to recapture lost territory. Military sources said that 118 soldiers were killed and more than 800 wounded. The rebels did not give figures for their own casualties but a military spokesman said 160 rebel fighters were killed. [25f] Later in September 2000, the SLA captured Chavakachcheri, the second-largest town in the Jaffna peninsula, 6 miles east of Jaffna City. Tamil rebels responded by killing 24 soldiers in an attack on an army truck near Trincomalee. [25i]

3.44 On 25 October 2000, a massacre of 26 Tamil inmates at the Bandarawela Bindunuwewa rehabilitation centre occurred. Reports from the area said that hundreds of men carrying machetes and knives rampaged through the camp. The government ordered an enquiry into the events. [21z]

3.45 Government troops continued their offensive against the LTTE in December 2000 when they re-established a road link between the Jaffna peninsula's two largest cities, Jaffna and Chavakachcheri. [25k] Fierce fighting continued into January 2001 with a major battle leaving more than 90 dead and at least 230 injured. [21x]

3.46 Meanwhile, Tamil Tiger rebels announced a unilateral month-long cease-fire to run from 24 December 2000. [21y] The government said it wanted talks with the rebels, but would not lay down its arms first. The truce was extended for a third time until 24 April 2001, but the LTTE said they would end it unless the government responded positively and stopped fighting. [25l] The LTTE announced an end to the cease-fire on 23 April 2001, blaming the government for the failure of peace efforts. The rebels said they had suffered a large number of casualties injuries in government attacks while the cease-fire was in force. [25m]

3.47 On 28 February 2001, the British Home Secretary included the LTTE in the list of proscribed organisations under the Terrorism Act 2000. The Home Secretary's Draft Order contained 20 other organisations, and would come into force when approved by both Houses of the United Kingdom Parliament. The proscribed organisation or any person affected by the ban could appeal to the Home Secretary. If this application were rejected, an application for judicial review could be made to a tribunal known as the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission. [10e]

3.48 As outlined by BBC News OnLine reports, on 24 July 2001 Tamil Tigers attacked the Katunayake Air Force Base and the adjacent Bandaranaike International Airport. Fourteen LTTE cadres and seven military personnel were killed. Eight military aircraft were destroyed at the air base, and another six passenger planes - half the Sri Lankan Airways fleet - put out of action at Bandaranaike International Airport. Three of these passenger planes were completely destroyed. [35g] Officials then announced that a new, senior-level committee had been established to oversee new security measures at the international airport. A government spokesman described the new steps to strengthen security as a bid to reassure international airlines and the travel trade. [35h]

3.49 The President suspended Parliament from July to September 2001 out of concern that her coalition had lost its majority in Parliament because of defections. The ruling PA coalition re-established control through an accord with the JVP. The suspension of Parliament angered opposition parties, which sponsored numerous demonstrations. One of these demonstrations on 19 July 2001, ended with the deaths of two marchers killed by security forces. However, after further defections from her coalition, the President dissolved Parliament on 10 October 2001 and called for elections to take place on 5 December 2001. [2e]

3.50 The United National Front, a coalition of parties led by the United National Party (UNP) [2e] obtained 109 seats, and therefore defeated the ruling People's Alliance (PA) headed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who came second with 77 seats. [8y] As leader of the UNP, Ranil Wickremasinghe became the new Prime Minister with Chandrika Kumaratunga continuing as President. [35c] The full results (with the number of seats won in the 2000 parliamentary elections in brackets) were: -

United National Party (UNP)	109 (89)
People's Alliance (PA)	77 (107)
People's Liberation Front - Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)	16 (10)
Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)	15 (5)
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC)	5 (4)
Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP)	2 (4)
Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF)	1 (0)
Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO)*	0 (3)
All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC)*	0 (1)
Sihala Urumaya	0 (1)
Independent group	0 (1)

*Campaigned separately in 2000, but now allied to the TULF

[8y]

3.51 Despite an extremely violent campaign, voter turnout exceeded 70%. The People's Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) reported 755 incidents of violence and 49 deaths. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) reported 4,208 incidents and 73 deaths. [2e] After the election violence, the government began an amnesty for the surrender of illegal firearms in an effort to restore law and order. Over a 15-day period, members of the public were able to hand in unauthorised weapons to their nearest police station without fear of prosecution. [35e]

3.52 Mahinda Rajapakse was appointed leader of the opposition PA in February 2002, succeeding former Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake. [8z]

3.53 In March 2002 the UNP won an unprecedented landslide victory in local polls, taking 217 councils out of the 222 that held elections. The PA came a distant second with just four councils, with the JVP taking one. The vote was peaceful by Sri Lanka's normal bloody standards, but clashes killed five people. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe called the election a *de facto* referendum on the Norwegian-brokered peace process and said the vote was a resounding mandate for the plan aimed at ending nearly two decades of ethnic war. [8b]

The Peace Process January 2000 - April 2002

3.54 In January 2000, the PA Government said it would discuss a devolution proposal, aimed at ending the lengthy civil war, with all political parties as well as Tamil Tiger rebels, and that a new constitution would be drafted containing the new proposals. The devolution

plan was supported by the opposition United National Party. [21b] It also emerged for the first time that international mediators had been trying to broker a peace deal with the LTTE since 1997. The first attempt was made by Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Anyoku, and later by the Norwegian Government. [21c]

3.55 On 8 August 2000, the Sri Lankan Government indefinitely postponed the vote on the reform bill, which if enacted, would have allowed the Tamil community in the north greater autonomy. Senior ministers said they had decided to delay the bill when it became clear they would be unable to muster the required two-thirds majority in parliament. [21t]

3.56 The new UNP government announced a month-long cease-fire to start on 24 December 2001, reciprocating an earlier declaration by the LTTE. [7h] The main opposition People's Alliance promptly indicated its willingness to support the government in its efforts. [7o]

3.57 In an unexpected move, all barriers, barricades and checkpoints were removed in Colombo a few days after the commencement of the cease-fire. It meant that residents of Colombo were free to move anywhere unimpeded for the first time in seven years. [7z]

3.58 On 2 January 2002, the Sri Lankan government announced a major easing of an economic embargo on rebel-held areas in the north of the country, a key demand of the LTTE. A Defence Ministry statement said that nearly all goods could be traded [35i] including food and medicines [35j] apart from a small number of items such as arms, explosives and binoculars. [35i]

3.59 Also in January 2002 it was reported that restrictions had been eased on the movement of civilians in and out of Vavuniya. The government had made it easier to obtain passes and lifted the requirement of a guarantee for those seeking permits for longer stays. [35j]

3.60 On 21 January 2002 the Sri Lankan government announced that it would extend the cease-fire for another month (until 24 February 2002), matching a unilateral extension made by the LTTE the previous day. [35k]

3.61 Later in January 2002, Lieutenant General Lionel Balagalle, Sri Lanka's top military commander, urged his senior officers to consider integrating Tamil Tiger rebels into the armed forces if the peace process succeeded, and to address the issue of absorbing former militants into society. Lieutenant General Balagalle said that the truce was holding except for minor violations. [35l]

3.62 On 13 February 2002, the government lifted all restrictions on the movement of medicines and medical equipment to the country's war-torn northern districts, as part of continuing confidence-building measures intended to promote peace talks. A military spokesman said that no controls would be placed on quantity or brand but the transported stocks would be monitored at checkpoints for security reasons. [8s]

3.63 An announcement was made on 22 February 2002 that the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels had signed a permanent cease-fire ending 19 years of civil war. [35m]

3.64 A BBC News OnLine report of 22 February 2002 detailed the text of the truce deal. The

preamble to the agreement states the overall objective is to find a negotiated solution to the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Article 2 of the agreement deals with measures to restore normalcy. This includes both parties, in accordance with international law, abstaining from hostile acts against the civilian population, including such acts as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment; the parties refraining from engaging in activities or propagating ideas that could offend cultural or religious sensitivities; the parties reviewing security measures and the set-up of checkpoints, particularly in densely populated cities and towns, in order to prevent harassment of the civilian population; the parties agreeing that search operations and arrests made under the Prevention of Terrorism Act shall not be made, and that arrests shall be conducted under due process of law in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Code; and the parties agreeing to provide family members of detainees access to those detainees. [35n]

3.65 On 6 March 2002 it was announced that a further series of travel and other restrictions had been lifted. The rules differed from area to area but local media reported that in one part of the northern Vavuniya district the number of travel permits had been reduced from 24 to 3. [8t] In the ICRC Newsletter number 21 of March 2002, the organisation states it had agreed to act as a conduit for the passing of information between the parties concerned whenever there was an issue that affected the needs and the welfare of ordinary civilians. The ICRC referred to the opening of the two crossing points into the LTTE-controlled Vanni region from the government-controlled area on 15 February 2002, and regarded this event as dramatically reducing travelling time from the southern regions to population centres in the Vanni and back. This event had also permitted a large number of people to cross between the areas of control and also for a greatly increased quantity of goods to be transported both ways. In this manner some 300,000 people living in the area would benefit from better access to services and facilities. [34b]

3.66 Nordic Observers began monitoring the cease-fire on 2 April 2002. Representatives from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark would carry out the monitoring, working with local observers in six Districts in the North East Province. There had been no combat-related deaths reported since the truce was signed, although both sides had complained of provocations, particularly in the East. The commencement of monitoring followed on from an announcement that Thailand would host the first face-to-face peace talks between the two sides since 1995. [8u]

3.67 Also in April 2002, the LTTE opened a political office in a government-held area in the north of the country. The office in Vavuniya was inaugurated under the terms of the cease-fire agreement which allows the Tamil Tigers to engage in political activity in areas outside their control provided they are unarmed and out of military-style uniforms. In a sign of reconciliation, the Tigers invited a member of the Sinhalese community to open the office. It was the first major public appearance by the LTTE outside territory held by them. [35o] The previous month, troops allowed LTTE cadres wearing cyanide capsules to move back into an uncleared [i.e. LTTE-controlled] area. Troops manning a roadblock close to Batticaloa town had come across the two cadres who were dressed in civil clothes at the time. However, since the cadres intention was to proceed into the uncleared areas, troops allowed them to proceed after recording their details. [17b]

3.68 A further development in April 2002 was the opening of the strategic A9 highway, a key road linking the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the country. It was the first time the road had been opened in 12 years, and meant that civilians under the control of Tamil Tiger rebels could travel freely to government-controlled areas. This event came a week after the

authorities lifted a six-year ban on domestic flights and cleared the way for commercial airlines to resume services to the war-ravaged Jaffna peninsula. [35p]

3.69 On 10 April 2002, LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, gave his first press conference for 12 years. [38]

3.70 On 13 April 2002, the LTTE signed a landmark pact with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), allowing the largest Muslim party to be independently represented at the proposed peace talks, making it a tripartite negotiation structure that previously involved only the government and the LTTE. The LTTE also agreed that nearly 100,000 Muslims expelled from the north by the Tamil Tigers a decade previously would be allowed to return to their original dwelling places. [7y]

3.71 On 17 April 2002, the leader of the LTTE cultural and social wing, Puthuvai Ratnadurai, addressed a public gathering in Jaffna; the first time such an event had taken place in 7 years. A BBC correspondent said the fact that the security forces allowed this celebration of Tamil culture and nationalism to take place at all, showed how much freedom the rebels now had to operate in areas under government control. [35q]

For further details of history prior to 1994, refer to Europa Year Book, source [1]

4 STATE STRUCTURES

The Constitution

4.1 The Constitution was promulgated on 7 September 1978. It guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens, including freedom of thought, conscience and worship and equal entitlement before the law. [1] The Government generally respects these rights. [2e] Buddhism has the foremost place among religions and the State has a duty to protect and foster Buddhism. Sinhala and Tamil are the two official languages. [1]

4.2 The Constitution provides for equal rights under the law for all its citizens and the Government generally respects these rights. The Supreme Court regularly upholds court rulings in cases where individuals have complained about violations of their fundamental civil rights. The Human Rights Commission and the Committee to Inquire into Undue Arrest and Harassment are other mechanisms the Government has established to ensure enforcement of constitutional provisions in addition to access to the courts. [2e]

Political System

4.3 The President is Head of State and exercises all executive powers. The President is directly elected by the people for a term of 6 years, and is eligible for re-election. The current President is Mrs Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga of the People's Alliance, who was sworn in on 12 November 1994, [1] and re-elected on 21 December 1999. [23a]

4.4 The Sri Lankan Parliament consists of one chamber with 225 members, and Members of Parliament are directly elected by a system of modified proportional representation. [1]

4.5 Sri Lanka comprises 9 provinces and 25 administrative districts, each with an appointed Governor and elected Development Council. In November 1987, an amendment to the Constitution was adopted, providing for the creation of eight provincial councils (the northern and eastern provinces were to be merged as one administrative unit). A network of 68 Pradeshiya Sabhas (district councils) was inaugurated throughout the country in January 1988. [1] & [26]

Judiciary

4.6 The judiciary in Sri Lanka is independent and properly constituted. [2e]

4.7 The judicial system consists of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court, District Courts, Magistrates' Courts and Primary Courts. The last four are Courts of the First Instance. Appeals lie from them to the Court of Appeal and from there, on questions of law, or by special leave, to the Supreme Court. The High Court deals with all criminal cases, and the District Courts with civil cases. There are also Labour Tribunals to decide labour-based disputes. [1]

4.8 The Judicial Service Commission comprises the Chief Justice and two judges of the Supreme Court, nominated by the President. All judges of the Courts of First Instance (except High Court judges), and the staff of all courts are appointed and controlled by the Judicial Service Commission. The Supreme Court consists of the Chief Justice and not fewer than 6 and not more than 10 other judges. The Court of Appeal consists of the President, and not fewer than 6 and not more than 11 judges. [1]

Military Service

4.9 Conscription does not exist. Because of the conflict between the government and the LTTE, the armed forces have expanded considerably, from 20,000 troops in the early 1980s to 115,000 in 1997. The legal recruitment age for the armed forces is 18. There is no known legal provision for conscientious objection. [36]

4.10 Desertion is punishable under article 103 of the Army Act by up to three years' imprisonment. Although desertion has been widespread, because of the paucity of recruits, the punishment of deserters rarely occurs. Amnesties for deserters have been announced several times, usually in the context of recruitment drives. According to these amnesties, deserters are allowed to return to their units without facing further penalties. Deadlines for amnesties are often extended as not all deserters apply in time to meet the initial deadline. [36]

Internal Security

4.11 The Ministry of Defence controls all security forces (armed forces and police). The 60,000-member police force is responsible for internal security in most areas of the country and has also been used in military operations against the LTTE. The 120,000-member army (which includes the Army Volunteer Force), the 17,000-member navy and 18,500-member air force bear principal responsibility for conducting operations against the LTTE. The police paramilitary Special Task Force (STF) was also involved in the war. The more than 20,000-member Home Guards, an armed force drawn from local communities and responsible to the police, provides security for Muslim and Sinhalese village communities in or near the

war zone. [2e]

4.12 Investigating agencies include the Operational Command of Colombo Security (OCC), the Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DII), the Directorate of Foreign Intelligence (DFI), the Criminal Record Department (CRD), the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID). The TID was set up in May 1998 as a new investigative agency of the police. The DII and DFI, until the summer of 1998, together formed the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB). [14b] Police are recruited nationally, not locally, and any Sri Lankan national, including those of Tamil ethnicity, are free and welcome to join the police force. [39]

Legal Rights/Detention

4.13 The authorities are required, by law, to inform an individual of the reason for their arrest, and to produce him or her before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest. In practice, this usually occurs within a few days. [2e]

4.14 In criminal cases, defendants are tried publicly by jury. Defendants are informed of the charges and evidence against them, are represented by Counsel of their choice, and also have a right of appeal against sentence. The Government provides Counsel for indigent persons who are to be tried on criminal charges in the High Courts, and the Court of Appeal, but not in other instances; private legal aid organisations also exist. [2e]

4.15 Under the Emergency Regulations ERs (which lapsed in July 2001) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), security forces may detain suspects for extended periods of time without court approval. [2e] - up to 18 months in the case of the PTA. [14a] The ER, in force periodically since 1979 and in force island-wide from August 1998 until July 2001, allowed pretrial detention for a maximum of four consecutive 3-month periods. In November 2001 the Government, in response to continuing and widespread criticism of unreported arrests standardised and simplified regulations under the existing law and established a registry for all those arrested under the PTA or ER. [2e]

4.16 Magistrates have key roles in relation to the prevention of torture, which they do not always fully perform. Officers in charge of places of detention are required to provide the local magistrate every 14 days a list of all detainees, and the magistrate has to display the list on the court's notice board. These safeguards have never been fully implemented. [3e]

4.17 Under the Code of Criminal Procedure, magistrates have a duty to examine detainees brought before them. There are reports that magistrates do not carry out this duty rigorously. This failure erodes the chances of tortured detainees receiving justice at a later stage. [3e]

4.18 Sri Lanka acceded to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on 3 January 1994, but has not recognised the competence of the Committee against Torture to consider communications made in accordance with Articles 21 and 22 of the Convention. The Convention Against Torture Act 1994 gives effect to the Convention in accordance with the Sri Lankan legal system. [6e] Several provisions in the UN Convention against Torture were not fully implemented in the Torture Act, which uses a more restrictive definition of torture than that contained in the UN Convention against Torture. [3e]

4.19 The 1994 Convention Against Torture Act (CATA) made torture a punishable offence

and specific crime. The High Court has jurisdiction over violations, and criminal conviction carries a 7-year minimum sentence. The Government is developing regulations to prosecute and punish military and police personnel responsible for torture. The Attorney-General's Office and the Criminal Investigation Unit have established units to focus on torture complaints. These units forwarded 14 cases for indictment during 2001. The Inter-parliamentary Permanent Standing Committee and its Inter-ministerial Working Group on Human Rights Issues have begun tracking criminal investigations of torture. In addition the Government also ceased paying fines incurred by security force personnel found guilty of torture. Security force personnel have been fined under civil statutes for engaging in torture. [2e]

4.20 Sri Lanka has acceded to the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). [6e] The Government has followed a number of recommendations made by the monitoring committee under the ICCPR. [14a]

4.21 On the Amnesty International "Website Against the Death Penalty" they list Sri Lanka among those countries which are abolitionist in practice. This is explained as countries which retain the death penalty for ordinary crimes such as murder but can be considered abolitionist in practice in that they have not executed anyone during the past 10 years and are believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions. This list also includes countries which have made an international commitment not to use the death penalty. [3i]

Prisons

4.22 Generally, prison conditions are poor and do not meet minimum international standards because of overcrowding and lack of sanitary facilities. [2e] Home Office officials were told on their fact-finding mission of 9-13 July 2001 that prisons had become 300% overcrowded over the previous 5 years. There were currently about 17,000 people in prison, 9,000 of whom were on remand. However, the Prison Service had embarked on a six-year improvement project, and part of this had been moving facilities out of the Colombo area. [39]

Medical Services

4.23 In a letter dated 30 March 2001, the British High Commission in Colombo outlined the standards of medical facilities in Sri Lanka. The traditional Western medical structure of general practitioners, specialists and hospitals with operating theatres and emergency units, co-exists with the traditional practice of ayurvedic (or herbal) medicine. The country has its own National Health Service, which is available to everyone. [15c]

4.24 In the Colombo area and one or two of the larger centres such as Kandy, there are many well-reputed hospitals, staffed by physicians most of whom are very experienced and internationally trained. There is an extensive range of specialist care found in Colombo, both in the private and government sectors. Specialist care would include treating such conditions as cardiac, gastro-intestinal, dermatological, urological, orthopaedic and general surgery. [15c]

4.25 Most medications are available in Colombo, under various generic and company labels. The prices for medications bought in Sri Lanka range widely, but as a comparison, most drugs would be cheaper than the United Kingdom for prescription and dispensing

charges. On the whole, medical care is affordable for the average person, and government hospitals generally charge a lesser fee than private hospitals. [15c] Health care for children, including immunisation, is free. [2e]

4.26 The World Health Organization estimates that 7% of the population of Sri Lanka have disabilities. Most people with disabilities, who are unable to work, are cared for by their families. The Department of Social Services operates eight vocational training schools for people with physical and mental disabilities and sponsors a program of job training and placement for graduates. The Government also provides some financial support to NGOs that assist persons with disabilities; subsidises prosthetic devices and other medical aids for persons with disabilities; makes some purchases from suppliers with disabilities; and has registered 74 schools and training institutions for persons with disabilities run by NGOs. The Social Services Ministry has selected job placement officers to help the estimated 200,000 work-eligible persons with disabilities find jobs. In spite of these efforts, people with disabilities still face difficulties because of negative attitudes and societal discrimination. In 1996 Parliament passed legislation forbidding discrimination against any person on the grounds of disability. [2e]

Educational System

4.27 The law requires children between the ages of 5 and 14 to attend school. Approximately 85% of children under the age of 16 attend school. Education is free through to university level. [2e]

HUMAN RIGHTS

PART 1 : HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

PART 2: HUMAN RIGHTS - SPECIFIC GROUPS

PART 3: HUMAN RIGHTS - OTHER ISSUES

5.1 HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Overview

5.1.1 According to the U.S Department of State Report issued in March 2002, the Sri Lankan Government generally respects the human rights of its citizens in areas not affected by the conflict with the LTTE. However, the ongoing war continued to be accompanied by serious human rights abuses committed by both sides of the conflict. Security forces committed numerous extra-judicial killings, and impunity remains a problem. [2e]

5.1.2 In May 2000 the Sri Lankan authorities assumed sweeping new powers. The Public Security Act, introduced a day after the authorities put Sri Lanka on a war footing, allowed the Government to impound property, prohibit strikes, ban newspapers and censor foreign media. [21o] Any news story deemed by the government to contain sensitive information

relating to the war was not allowed to be published. [21p] A relaxation of the laws occurred when on 2 July 2000 Sunday newspapers were published freely for the first time in three months, after the Supreme Court ruled that censorship was illegal. Reporting of the fighting was still controlled and journalists were still largely prevented from visiting war zones. [21q] Despite the relaxation, the following day the Government announced a new series of restrictions on local and foreign media. Under the terms of the new measures, the Government would strongly encourage reporters to submit news stories for official approval if they were deemed to compromise national security or the actions of the security forces. It was unclear how the regulations would be implemented, but the Government announced that it did not mean censorship had been reintroduced. [21r]

5.1.3 The Government has taken steps to control human rights abuses. In 2000, the Government named a new chairman and five new commissioners for the Human Rights Commission (HRC). However, crucial safeguards built into the ER and the legislation establishing the Human Rights Commission were being routinely ignored by the security forces, especially those provisions requiring receipts to be issued for arrests and ordering the security forces to notify the HRC of any arrest within 48 hours. [2e] But according to the Danish Immigration Service Report on their fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka, published January 1999, the Human Rights Commission themselves noted that the rule requiring the police to inform it within 48 hours was in the main being observed and there had been improvements in this respect. [32]

5.1.4 Pro-government Tamil militants have been implicated in cases involving extra-judicial killing, torture, detention, and extortion. [2e]

5.1.5 The LTTE have also been responsible for human rights violations, including attacks on civilians, extra-judicial executions, torture, arbitrary arrest, detention, disappearances, extortion and the killing of prisoners taken on the battlefield. The LTTE control large areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka and denied those under its control the right to change their government, infringed on privacy rights, did not provide for fair trials, restricted freedom of movement, used child soldiers, and severely discriminated against ethnic and religious minorities. [2e]

Freedom of Speech and the Media

5.1.6 The Sri Lankan Government controls the country's largest newspaper chain, two major television stations, and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC, a radio station). There are a variety of independent, privately owned newspapers, journals and radio and television stations, most of which freely criticize the Government and its policies. There is also a privately owned newspaper published in Jaffna. The Government imposes no political restrictions on the establishment of new media enterprises. [2e]

5.1.7 Although the Constitution provides for freedom of speech and expression, the Government restricts these rights in practice, often using national security grounds permitted by law. However, in July 2001 the Government stopped censoring reporting on military and security operations. In previous years, the Government had stringent censorship regulations and on occasion security forces harassed journalists and shut down newspapers critical of the Government. Travel by foreign and national journalists to the conflict areas was restricted during 2001, as they were required to obtain advance permission from the Ministry of Defence to visit such areas. The Government remains the only source of most news about security and defence matters that can be disseminated to the public. [2e]

5.1.8 The Sri Lankan Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA) was formed in 1999 to protect the interests of Tamil journalists, who allege that they are subject to harassment and intimidation by Tamil paramilitary groups and Sri Lankan security forces. [2e]

5.1.9 In October 2000, Tamil journalist, Maylwaganam Nimalarajan, was shot dead in Jaffna. Nimalarajan, who worked for Colombo's Tamil language daily Virakesari, had reported on vote rigging and intimidation during the parliamentary elections that month. [25j]

5.1.10 On 28 December 2001, police reported an attack that had occurred two days previously on Dharmaratnam Sivaram, editor of the Tamilnet Web site. He was stabbed and beaten by a group of men armed with clubs in his office in Batticaloa. [8a]

Freedom of Religion

5.1.11 Discrimination based on religious differences is much less common in Sri Lanka than discrimination based on ethnic group or caste. In general, the members of the various faiths tend to be tolerant of each other's religious beliefs. [2e]

5.1.12 Buddhism is given the foremost position, but the Constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religion freely. The Government respects this right in practice and major religious festivals of all faiths are celebrated as public holidays. [2e] Theravada Buddhism is the predominant sect in Sri Lanka with an estimated 53,000 Buddhist Bhikkhus (monks) living in about 6,000 temples. [1]

5.1.13 Approximately 15% of the population of Sri Lanka are Tamil-speaking Hindus. [1]

5.1.14 Approximately 7% of the population are Muslims. In 1990, the LTTE expelled virtually the entire Muslim population, some 46,000 inhabitants, from their homes in the north of Sri Lanka. The LTTE expropriated Muslim homes, land and businesses, and threatened Muslim families with death if they attempted to return. They currently live in refugee camps. Other Tamil groups such as the EPRLF and the ENDLF have also launched attacks on Muslims from Trincomalee down to Batticaloa. [1], [2c] & [16a]

5.1.15 On 30 April 2001 a violent clash between the Sinhalese and Muslim communities occurred in Mawanella. The Muslim community protested alleged police inaction concerning the assault on a Muslim store clerk. In response, a group of Sinhalese attacked the Muslim protesters. As the conflict escalated, two Muslims were killed and scores of buildings and a few vehicles were destroyed. Minor protests by Muslims continued until 4 May 2001, when there was a large-scale protest in Colombo. The police broke up the demonstration with force and imposed a curfew on the city. The Government was investigating the Mawanella incident at the end of 2001. [2e]

5.1.16 In April 2002 the LTTE admitted that the expulsion of thousands of Muslims from the Jaffna peninsula in 1990 was an unjustifiable "political blunder", and promised that the LTTE would re-settle them as soon as normalcy was restored in Sri Lanka. [7g]

5.1.17 There is a sizeable Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) minority in Sri Lanka, which makes up approximately 8% of the population. It is scattered throughout Sri Lanka and consists of Tamil and Sinhalese converts, as well as the smaller Burgher community. Evangelical Christians, who constitute less than 1% of the population, have expressed

concern that their attempts to proselytise are often met with hostility and harassment by the local Buddhist clergy, and others opposed to their work. The Methodists and the Dutch Reformed Church are also represented, as are Anglicans, Baptists and the Church of South India. [1] & [2c]

5.1.18 There is also a spiritual assembly for worshippers of the Bahá'í faith in Colombo. [1]

Freedom of Assembly and Association

5.1.19 The law provides for freedom of assembly, and the Government respects these rights in practice. Although the Prevention of Terrorism Act may restrict this freedom, the Government did not use the act for that purpose in 2001. The Emergency Regulations, which lapsed in July 2001, had in the past restricted the right of assembly, but were not invoked during 2001. The Government generally grants permits for demonstrations including those by opposition parties and minority groups. [2e]

Employment Rights

5.1.20 The Government also respects the constitutional right of workers to establish unions, and the country has a strong union tradition. Most of the larger unions are affiliated to political parties and together play a prominent role in the political process. Over 30 labour unions are politically affiliated although a smaller number remain unaffiliated. Sri Lankan law also provides the right to collective bargaining, which is widely practised. The law prohibits anti-union discrimination. [2e]

5.1.21 All workers, other than civil servants and workers in "essential" services, have the right to strike. [2e]

5.1.22 The Constitution guarantees equal employment opportunities to women in the public sector. At present, they have no legal protection against discrimination in the private sector where they are sometimes paid less than men for equal work and often experience difficulty in rising to supervisory positions. Women constitute approximately half of the formal work force. [2e]

5.1.23 Regular employment of children occurs in the informal sector and in family enterprises such as family farms, crafts, small trade establishments, restaurants, and repair shops. Children are also involved in the manufacture of coconut fibre products, bricks, fishing, wrapping tobacco, street trading and farming. Additionally thousands of children are believed to be employed in domestic service. [2e]

5.1.24 The minimum age for employment is 14 and children under the age of 16 may not be employed in any public enterprise in which life or limb is endangered. The law also permits the employment of younger children by their parents or guardians in limited agricultural work. [2e]

People Trafficking

5.1.25 Recent reports indicate Italy as a destination for Sri Lankans who are handled by people traffickers. A BBC OnLine news item reported that in January 2002, a group of 72 Sri Lankan men were detained as illegal immigrants by police in southern Italy. Two more groups totalling about 200 people had earlier landed in Sicily. In 2001 several thousand

illegal immigrants from Sri Lanka arrived in southern Italy after a 2,500-mile sea journey in small boats through the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. The BBC report indicates that those arrivals who have relatives in northern Europe will try to make their way there after being processed by Italian immigration authorities. [35a] Also in January 2002, the Sri Lankan navy detained more than 100 people off the coast of Negombo after it boarded two fishing trawlers that were bound for Italy. [35b] On 3 February 2002, a trawler carrying about 100 Italy-bound job seekers capsized off the coast of Sri Lanka killing 10 people. Survivors from the accident said they had paid between US\$1200 and US\$1500 for their illegal passage, with more to be paid once they found work in Italy. [8x]

5.1.26 The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, Sri Lanka is a country of origin and destination for trafficked persons, primarily women and children for the purposes of forced labour, and for sexual exploitation. Sri Lankan women travel to Middle Eastern countries to work as domestics and some have reported being forced into domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. Sri Lankan women are trafficked to Singapore for purposes of sexual exploitation. Some Sri Lankan children are trafficked internally both for sexual exploitation and as domestics. [2e]

Freedom of Movement

5.1.27 The Constitution grants every citizen "freedom of movement and of choosing his residence" and "freedom to return to Sri Lanka." The Government generally respects the right to domestic and foreign travel. [2e] Every Sri Lankan must be able to identify him or herself on the street. To this end, all Sri Lankans are issued with a National Identity Card (NIC) on reaching their 16th birthday. [14b] In 1997 the Front Office was set up in Colombo with the task of assisting people from strife-ridden areas of Sri Lanka, including the northern and eastern areas, who have lost or are unable to produce for example birth certificates, and are therefore prevented from obtaining a National Identity Card. The Front Office can also help people returning from abroad, including rejected asylum applicants, who could normally obtain a National Identity Card within two weeks of application. [32]

5.1.28 The Family Rehabilitation Centre (FRC), a local NGO, is able to give assistance to those who need to obtain a NIC and advice is given on what documents are needed and how they can be obtained. One of the problems often encountered by people coming to Colombo from the North is that their documents have been burnt in attacks on their homes. The FRC can give advice on how to obtain birth certificates or obtain reports from village heads to enable people to obtain NICs. They have legal officers who can help with this process. Another NGO, the Forum for Human Dignity (FHD) also helps in this area. They can verify and then stamp an individual's photograph to confirm authenticity and they then send the applicant to the Front Office to obtain his or her card. [39]

5.1.29 Until May 1997, the start of the army offensive in the Vanni, the LTTE checked travel passes at its border crossing near Omantai on the road to Vavuniya. Further south, near Nochchimodai, there was another checkpoint manned by members of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), which identified LTTE activists and handed them over to the army. The army checkpoint was a little further south, near Tandikulam, where the National Identity Card had to be shown. Travellers were questioned about their destination and then detained in a camp near Vavuniya while enquiries were made in Colombo concerning their stated destination. [14a]

5.1.30 The Refugee Council reported in December 2000 that citizens from Jaffna wishing to

travel to southern areas of Sri Lanka were facing considerable difficulty in obtaining permits to leave the peninsula. Because of the lengthy procedure in obtaining these permits, local people said the process was taking weeks and sometimes months. [10d] However, with the opening of A9 highway linking the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the country, it meant that civilians under the control of Tamil Tiger rebels could travel freely to government-controlled areas. The authorities also allowed commercial airlines to resume services to the Jaffna peninsula. [35p]

5.1.31 In January 2002 it was reported that restrictions had been eased on the movement of civilians in and out of Vavuniya, in the north of the country. The government had made it easier to obtain passes and lifted the requirement of a guarantee for those seeking permits for longer stays. [35j]

5.1.32 Every Sri Lankan citizen wishing to travel abroad must have a valid passport issued centrally by the Department of Immigration/Emigration in Colombo. Passport application forms are issued by district offices (kachcheri) and forwarded to Colombo. Applicants must submit a birth certificate, which can be obtained in the Jaffna peninsula or from the office of the Registrar-General in Colombo, a National Identity Card, and photos certified by a justice of the peace. Passports are checked on exit at the airport. [14a] & [32] A same day service is available, but the normal service takes 10 working days. Exit permits are not required. [39] Passengers departing from Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo, currently have to pass through a series of 3 security checkpoints before reaching the departure terminal. They may be asked for their National Identity Card at any of these checkpoints. Even if accompanied by an agent through to the departure terminal, the passenger must submit to checking of documents whether the agent is present or not. [31] As outlined in the Home Office fact-finding mission report, since 22 March 2000 only passengers are allowed into the check-in area, which is screened off from the rest of the terminal. This was as a result of pressure from European embassies whose Airline Liaison Officers (ALOs) had been worried that agents had previously been able to signal to officials to allow people to embark. This measure has gone some way to improving the situation and has halted the previous practice whereby agents could accompany passengers right up to the departure gate. [39]

5.1.33 Repatriated Tamils carry an "emergency certificate" from the Sri Lanka High Commission unless they have a valid travel document of their own. On production of this document, the holder may apply to the Registrar-General's Office in Colombo for a birth certificate, on the basis of which a National Identity Card can be issued. If a Tamil registers as having come from abroad, there is no reason for the authorities to regard him as coming from the north of Sri Lanka and consequently send him to Vavuniya. [14a]

5.1.34 UNHCR in their Background Paper on Sri Lanka published on 18 March 1999 for the European High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration, stated that Sri Lankan asylum seekers whose claims have been through full and fair procedures and found not to fulfil the refugee criteria may be returned safely to Sri Lanka. They state that where the individual has no valid travel documents, he/she should be assisted to obtain relevant documentation from the nearest Sri Lankan diplomatic post as such documents would greatly facilitate the person's arrival, travel and stay upon return to the country. [16b]

5.1.35 The Border Police Directorate in Koblenz, Germany confirmed the collective deportation of 20 Sri Lankan nationals to Colombo on 16 March 2000. This event attracted a great deal of attention on the part of the Sri Lankan media and human rights organisations

as well as Tamil politicians. Neither the claim of the Tamil deputy Selvarasa nor reports widely published claiming that the repatriation had ended with the deportees' arrest, torture and seizure of all personal documents were correct. Rather, two out of the 20 were arrested on remand for five days on the orders of a judge, for further investigation with regard to clarifying their identity and checking criminal records. The other 18 were freed on the day of their arrival and instructed to appear for a court hearing. Since only one of the deportees was in possession of a normal passport for entry into Sri Lanka, the remaining 19 emergency passports (issued only for the return trip) were confiscated. Regarding the torture allegations, one deportee claimed to have been hit, but later said this amounted to just a slap in the face. The other deportee held temporarily in custody denied that he had been treated incorrectly. Both were released on bail on 21 March 2000. [12]

5.1.36 Although UNHCR have been informed on a number of occasions by airport immigration authorities in Colombo that a temporary identification document and/or a photocopy is issued to returned asylum seekers when the documentation they travelled on is retained, they found that this was not always the case. However, such persons are able to collect an Emergency Certificate from the Immigration Head Office in Colombo on the following morning. UNHCR believe that it is extremely risky for such persons to be in Colombo without identification, but contend the immediate risk is at the airport itself. Officers from the Criminal Investigation Department sometimes detain Tamils leaving the airport to check their identification; some have been arrested, others have escaped by bribing officers. However, according to UNHCR, the chances of such persons being arrested in a round-up prior to obtaining an Emergency Certificate the next morning are slim; it would be considered a rare occurrence. [6h]

5.1.37 According to UNHCR, to the best of their knowledge, no Sri Lankan national returning from Europe has been regarded adversely by the Sri Lankan authorities merely on the assumption that they may have had contact with LTTE representatives in that European country. [6h]

5.1.38 Further information was obtained on the Home Office fact-finding mission of 9-13 July 2001. The MFA informed the delegation that those returning on a temporary travel document were now allowed to retain it and the police at the airport kept a photocopy. This process had been in place for a few months and was as a direct result of representation from foreign embassies, regarding concerns about returnees being able to provide evidence of their identity prior to obtaining a NIC. [39]

5.1.39 Fighting between the Government and LTTE has displaced hundreds of thousands of people, with many displaced multiple times as front lines shift. Fighting in Jaffna from April to June 2000 displaced an estimated 150,000, most of whom sought shelter with friends or relatives in other areas of the peninsula. Another 340,000 displaced reportedly live in the Vanni. Since September 2000, 172,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been living in welfare centers ranging from camps, where conditions vary considerably, to settlements with a full range of government social services and food aid. By the end of 2001, an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 IDPs, including those in the Vanni, had registered for government food aid and were receiving medicine and other essential supplies from the Government. [2e]

5.1.40 The Government has sought to resettle the displaced where possible and has arranged for a number of those from Jaffna to return to their homes. Other attempts at resettlement have also proved successful. Over the years, the Government, in cooperatio

with the UNHCR, built permanent housing for 18,000 Muslims in the Puttalam area. An additional one-time resettlement program relocated 800 families by September 2001, with a stated goal of 1,500 families by year's end. [2e]

5.1.41 During 1998 several thousand Tamils fled LTTE controlled areas to Tamil Nadu in southern India. An estimated 65,000 Tamil refugees lived in camps there, and another 100,000 refugees are believed to have been integrated into Tamil society in India. A small number returned to Sri Lanka during 2001. [2e]

5.2 HUMAN RIGHTS - SPECIFIC GROUPS

Women

5.2.1 Women in Sri Lanka have equal rights under national, civil and criminal law. However, individual issues relating to family law - such as divorce, child custody and inheritance - are adjudicated according to the customary law of each ethnic or religious group. This often results in discrimination against women. The minimum age of marriage for women is 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continue to follow their customary marriage practices. [2e]

5.2.2 Sexual assault, rape, and spousal abuse (often associated with alcohol abuse) represent serious and pervasive problems. The Government set up the Bureau for the Protection of Children and Women within the police force in 1994 to respond to calls for greater awareness and attention. In 1995 amendments to the Penal Code addressed sexual abuse and exploitation, and rape laws were modified to create a more equitable burden of proof and to make punishments more stringent. There are laws that cover sexual molestation and sexual harassment in the workplace. [2e]

5.2.3 The presidential directives for the welfare of detainees include special provisions to protect women. These include the provision that women taken into custody should be allowed to be accompanied to the place of questioning by a person of their choice and "as far as possible" should be placed in the custody of a women's unit of the relevant arm of the security forces. Nevertheless, each year a number of cases of rape by members of the security forces are reported, particularly from the north and east of the country. [3e] The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances report that soldiers accused of sexual harassment of Tamil women have been reduced in rank, detained for up to 90 days and discharged from the army. [6g]

5.2.4 In July 1998, 5 soldiers and a policeman were sentenced to death, having been found guilty of the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy after she was detained at an army checkpoint in Jaffna in 1996. [7v]

5.2.5 During 2001, there were further reports of women being raped by security forces while in detention. One such case involved two women arrested in Mannar. The women claim that they were tortured and repeatedly raped by naval and police personnel. The women were released on bail in April 2001, and filed charges against their assailants. At the end of 2001, the 14 accused were still in custody awaiting their trial date. Four other cases in which the security forces are accused of raping women in detention were still pending at the end of 2001. [2e]

5.2.6 Amnesty International produced a report in January 2002 and said that 2001 saw a marked increase in allegations of rape in custody, perpetrated by the army, police and navy. Whilst welcoming several measures, including the introduction of tough prison sentences for those committing rape in custody and gang rape, Amnesty urged the new UNP government to take additional measures for the prevention of rape in custody and the proper investigation of alleged incidents. The report notes that no perpetrators of rape in custody had so far been brought to justice, although one successful prosecution had been brought where the victim of rape was also murdered. [3g] In a press release issued in January 2002, Amnesty International welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court which on 25 January 2002 granted 150,000 Sri Lankan rupees in compensation to a Tamil woman who was raped in Colombo in June 2001. Amnesty stated that it was a landmark judgement as it was the first time that the court had awarded compensation to a rape victim. [3h]

5.2.7 Although there are no legal impediments to the participation of women in politics or government, the social mores in some communities limit women's activities outside the home. However, a woman was elected President for the first time in 1994, and was re-elected in 1999. [2e]

Children

5.2.8 The Government demonstrates a strong commitment to children's rights and welfare through its extensive systems of public education and medical care. [2e]

5.2.9 The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) Act was passed in 1998. Under this Act the definition of child abuse includes all acts of sexual violence against, trafficking in, and cruelty to children. The law also prohibits the use of children in exploitative labour or illegal activities, or in any act contrary to compulsory education regulations. The legislation further widened the definition of child abuse to include the involvement of children in war. The NCPA is comprised of representatives from the education, medical, retired police and legal professions and reports directly to the President. [2e]

5.2.10 In May 1998 Parliament passed amendments to laws protecting the rights of children in a bid to combat abuse. The use of children for begging, sexual intercourse and trafficking in drugs became offences punishable with a 5-year prison sentence. Courts will give priority to child abuse cases. [7q]

5.2.11 There is a significant problem of child prostitution in certain coastal resort areas. The Government estimates that there are more than 2,000 active child prostitutes in the country and the Government has pushed for greater international co-operation to bring those guilty of paedophilia to justice. [2e]

5.2.12 The LTTE recruits children for use in battlefield support functions and in combat. It has been confirmed that some of these children are as young as 13, and some are recruited forcibly. [2e] The United Nations Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Mr Olara Otunnu, visited Sri Lanka in May 1998 to assess the impact of the conflict on children. He received a commitment from the LTTE that they would no longer enlist child soldiers, a pledge which would be monitored by the UN. [7r] In October 1998 a UNICEF official in Sri Lanka said there had been little progress in implementation. [8d] Amnesty International have reported that in late 1998, after hundreds of losses in fighting against the Sri Lanka Army in the Vanni region, the LTTE stepped up recruitment in an area of the Jaffna

peninsula which they controlled. Scores of boys, some as young as 14 were forcibly recruited. [8m] In a report released on 3 February 2000, the Jaffna-based University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) claimed that the LTTE were continuing to pressure children to join their ranks. [22a]

5.2.13 The arrest and torture of children is not a common practice, but Amnesty International's June 1999 report on torture details 2 cases of torture of girls. [3e]

Ethnic Groups

Tamils

Introduction

5.2.14 Since independence in 1948, the primary conflict has been between Tamils and Sinhalese, as ethnic and religious divisions emerged. Because of their majority, the Sinhalese became more dominant, while the Tamils became increasingly marginalised. The struggle for cultural affirmation, political representation, economic advancement and linguistic parity between Sinhalese and Tamils ended in violence and armed conflict. The overriding political issue in Sri Lanka became the demand by some Tamil groups for an independent Tamil state called "Eelam". [6c]

5.2.15 Both Sri Lankan and up-country Tamils maintain that they have long been the victims of systematic discrimination in university education, government employment and in other matters controlled by the government [2e] and that they have been excluded from the benefits of economic development. [16a]

5.2.16 Tamils fleeing persecution or the war in the north east can generally find a safe haven in the areas under government control. There are large numbers of Tamils living in greater Colombo, the Puttalam district north of Negombo, and the central highlands. In Matale there is a long established community of "Up-country Tamils" as well as Tamils from the north east of Sri Lanka. [14a]

Arrests of Tamils in Colombo

5.2.17 There are estimated to be 150,000 Tamils from the north east in Colombo, in addition to the 250,000 Tamils who have been resident in the city for a long period. Tamils coming from the north usually seek accommodation with acquaintances or relatives, or in lodges. [14a]

5.2.18 Thousands of Tamils have been arrested in the past, particularly in Colombo and the east, for suspected contact with the LTTE, and as part of security operations to prevent LTTE terrorists from infiltrating the city. [3a]

5.2.19 Cordon-and-search operations were often carried out in areas with high concentrations of Tamils, including Tamil lodges. These operations occurred at irregular intervals and were intended to catch those missed by normal security measures. [5a] UNHCR state that visits to the lodges appeared to be planned, with the inherent belief that the security personnel may be able to benefit financially through the residents. [6h] However, the Dutch Foreign Ministry Report of 1999 concludes that permanent residents of these

lodges who have an identity card are not usually arrested. [14b]

5.2.20 A combination of fixed and moveable checkpoints were, in the past, used in Colombo, the type, number and location dependent on the prevailing security situation. Crossing checkpoints was sometimes a protracted process for those Tamils who do not speak Sinhala. [5a] However, with the removal of all barriers, barricades and checkpoints in December 2001, it meant that Colombo residents were free to move anywhere unimpeded for the first time in 7 years. [7z]

5.2.21 Information from UNHCR indicates that round-ups are not and never have been a daily feature of life in Colombo, although their frequency increased at times of tension, such as the LTTE assault on Jaffna in April-May 2000. The persons so apprehended were usually released within 48 hours, but in some cases this could be after 72 hours. [6h]

5.2.22 The UNHCR has indicated that Tamil asylum seekers with scars, should they be returned to Sri Lanka, may be more prone to adverse identification by the security forces and taken for rigorous questioning and potential ill-treatment. However, they also note that no particular distinctions can be made as to which type of scar may lead to potential ill treatment. This depends on the particular circumstances of the returned person and the significance an individual officer attaches to the types of scars in evidence. [6f] Recent advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, based on discussion with several Non-Governmental Organisations, journalists and MP's in Sri Lanka supports that view. [15b]

5.2.23 In discussions in Sri Lanka in July 2001, respondents including local NGOs rarely mentioned scarring, and then generally only when the subject was brought up by members of the UK Home Office fact-finding mission team. The views of many of the NGOs, and indeed the police, was that scarring was not likely to be an overriding reason for arresting or suspecting someone, but if a person had been stopped or arrested for some other reason, the presence of certain types of scars could be a reason for holding or questioning them further. Most respondents felt that scarring was only one of many factors which could play a part in the authorities' decision to detain someone. The issue was also discussed at the EU CIREA informal experts meeting in Brussels on 25-26 June 2001, and it was discovered that scarring was particularly prevalent in asylum claims in the United Kingdom. Whilst scarring had been raised in asylum applications made to EU partner states, it was rarely an overriding factor, and certainly not to the extent that it appeared to be in the United Kingdom. [39]

5.2.24 There are instances where the security forces have not adhered to the Presidential directives issued in 1995, in that "arrest receipts" are not issued, families are not informed of the place of detention, and the HRTF/HRC were not informed of the arrest. [3a]

5.2.25 Amnesty International is concerned that the government has not separated responsibility for custody from responsibility for investigation, one of the fundamental safeguards against torture and disappearances. [3c]

5.2.26 The Sri Lankan authorities maintained that people were arrested only on "reasonable grounds". These grounds included recent travel from the north and east, having a relative who is known to be or had been a member of the LTTE, information provided by other prisoners, or not being able to substantiate the reason for being in the area. [3a]

5.2.27 After thousands of Tamils were arrested in March and April 1998 in Colombo and the

surrounding areas, Tamil political parties demanded that arrest and detention should be strictly in accordance with the law and that the Presidential Directives providing safeguards to detainees should be observed. [10a] In April 1998 Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) MPs raised in the Sri Lankan Parliament the matter of the arrests of Tamils. The MP Neelan Tiruchelvam stated that in the previous few days around 5,000 residents of Colombo had been rounded up and detained despite their production of valid documents which showed their legitimate presence in the city. [8e]

5.2.28 The Attorney-General advised the security forces in April 1998 to arrest only on the basis of reasonable suspicion based on reliable information. [10a]

5.2.29 The Anti-Harassment Committee decided to establish a separate police unit to carry out investigations on complaints of security force harassment and for liaison between detainees and their families. All arrests under the [former] Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act must be reported to the AHC (now the CIUAH). [10b]

5.2.30 The Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH), issued guidelines on 7 September 1998 to security force officers on search operations, arrest and detention. Arrests are only to be made if evidence is available against the arrested person, who must be informed of the reasons for the arrest. Relatives should receive brief written reasons and informed of the place of detention. [10c]

5.2.31 The Sri Lanka Daily News reported in October 1998 that a cross-section of Tamils living in Colombo had told the Justice Minister, G Peiris, that the harassment that they had undergone had considerably reduced. This was because the security forces were conducting checks in houses and at roadblocks in a more polite and humane manner. The Justice Minister said that Tamil speaking police officers would be appointed to assist those Tamils taken to police stations. [17a]

5.2.32 Some human rights observers believe that the work of the CIUAH has acted as a deterrent to random arrests and has helped to alleviate some of the problems encountered by detainees and their families. [2e]

5.2.33 It was also possible that a Tamil in Colombo could be subjected to repeated brief arrests. The main reason for this was the police force not maintaining a central register of earlier identity checks. Most were released again within 48 or 72 hours. [14b]

5.2.34 In 1998, the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) urged expeditious disposal of applications for police registration, after seeing long queues of Tamils outside Colombo's police stations. [10c]

Disappearances

5.2.35 Between 1980 and 1997, 12,208 cases of disappearance alleged to have occurred in Sri Lanka were reported to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Cases reported since 1990 have occurred mainly in the east and north east of the country. The UN Working Group report states that the persons most often reported detained and missing were young Tamil men accused or suspected of belonging to, collaborating with, aiding or sympathising with the LTTE. Displaced Tamils were at particular risk of detention and disappearance. [6b]

5.2.36 Amnesty refer to the bodies of at least 31 people abducted from the capital which were found in lakes and rivers in the vicinity in 1995 (the "Bolgoda killings"). President Kumaratunga ordered the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to investigate the killings. The investigations resulted in a marked reduction in the number of such violations being reported from the capital. [3a] The case of the 22 STF members arrested on suspicion of the killings went to trial in June 2000. Since key witnesses did not appear, the prosecution asked for the case to be rescheduled. The hearing is expected to take place some time during 2002. [2e]

5.2.37 The US Embassy in Colombo knows of no cases of disappearance in 1996 in government-controlled areas of the west, centre and south of the country, apart from 3 cases in Colombo. [14a]

5.2.38 During 1997 approximately 100 cases of disappearance were reported, again mainly from Jaffna, Batticaloa, Mannar and Kilinochchi. [3c]

5.2.39 According to the US Department of State Report issued in March 2002, disappearances at the hands of the security forces continued in the north and east during 2001. The exact number of disappearances was impossible to ascertain due to censorship of news about security force operations and infrequent access to the north and east. [2e]

5.2.40 In April 1999, 23 skeletons were located in a sewage pit close to a stadium in Jaffna. The site was close to Chemmani, where the bodies of some 300 Tamils who went missing after being arrested by the army were allegedly buried. [7u] Excavations at the Chemmani site started in June 1999, witnessed by observers from Amnesty International and Physicians for Human Rights. Two skeletons, one with hands tied with rope, were exhumed. A magistrate stopped further exhumations and ordered forensic reports to be submitted. [8p] These reports stated that the victims had been assaulted and killed. [8r] Five of those convicted in the Kumaraswamy killings claimed knowledge of mass graves in the Chemmani area where they had allegedly buried between 120 and 140 bodies on the orders of their superiors; during this phase of exhumations, 15 bodies were uncovered. In December 1999, the Government submitted its forensic report to a magistrate in Jaffna. The report stated that 10 of the remains showed physical assault led to death. Former Lance Corpora Rajapakse and others convicted in the Kumaraswamy case also disclosed the names of 20 security force personnel who were allegedly responsible for the killings in the Chemmani case. The case was still pending at the end of 2001. [2e]

5.2.41 In December 2000, nine Tamil civilians were reported missing in Mirusuvil after being arrested by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA). One person escaped and reported the incident to police and the local magistrate. The magistrate took the person to the site and the escapee identified two SLA soldiers as the perpetrators. The soldiers admitted to torturing nine civilians and murdering eight, and identified the place of burial. The bodies were exhumed and nine soldiers were later arrested for the torture and killings. The army commander is monitoring the matter and has ordered a separate inquiry into the incident. The soldiers were administratively punished by having their salaries withheld by the SLA. The case had not come to trial by the end of 2001. [2e]

5.2.42 Tamil militias aligned with the former PA government have also been responsible for disappearances in the past, although there were no reports of this happening during 2001 [2e]

5.2.43 Amnesty International acknowledges that the Sri Lankan Government has taken positive steps to provide redress and prevent disappearances occurring in the first place, but there have been continuing reports of widespread human rights violations, including disappearances. Amnesty considers that the root causes must be tackled: the sense of impunity among the security forces and the powers of the [former] Emergency Regulations and Prevention of Terrorism Act which allow people to be detained for long periods of time. Forensic expertise is under-resourced; few prosecutions are initiated against those allegedly responsible for disappearances; effective measures are required to protect witnesses and relatives of disappeared persons against any form of intimidation or reprisal; and the safeguards which have been introduced are not being implemented effectively. Amnesty have also called for the ERs [which have now lapsed] and PTA to be brought into line with accepted international standards regarding due process and the treatment of prisoners. [3c]

5.2.44 The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances visited Sri Lanka between 25 and 29 October 1999, and published their report on 21 December 1999. The Working Group acknowledged that it had continued to receive valuable co-operation from the Government of Sri Lanka, and that no obstacles were encountered by the members of the mission in receiving representatives of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), witnesses, and relatives of missing persons. The Working Group appreciated the variety of measures which the various Governments of Sri Lanka had taken, in compliance with the Group's earlier recommendations for the purpose of clarifying cases of disappearances which had occurred previously, of providing justice to the families of disappeared persons, and of preventing future disappearances. However, notwithstanding all the encouraging facts, the Working Group stressed that Sri Lanka remained the country with the second largest number of non-clarified cases of disappearances on its list. In May 1999, a special "Unit for the Clarification of Cases of Alleged Forced or Involuntary Disappearances", was set up by the Cabinet of Ministers as part of the Rehabilitation of Persons, Properties and Industries Authority (REPPIA). This Unit has the specific task of establishing a database on disappearances in response to the cases transmitted by the Working Group to the Government of Sri Lanka. On the basis of this new (temporary) legislation, some 15,000 death certificates had been issued since 1995, and more than 12,000 families had received compensation. In almost 4,000 cases, suspected perpetrators were identified and criminal proceedings were instituted against some 500 members of the police and the armed forces. [6g]

Extra-judicial Executions

5.2.45 According to the U.S. Department of State Report issued in March 2002, since April 1995, several hundred people have been killed extra-judicially by the security forces or have disappeared after being taken into security force custody and are presumed dead. With the exception of the 6 security force personnel convicted in the 1996 killing of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy and the 4 convictions for abduction involving 88 security force personnel, no member of the security forces has been convicted for any of these crimes. [2e]

5.2.46 Amnesty International state that the police, army, and the Special Task Force (STF) have committed extra-judicial executions. Amnesty reports give details of the cases known to them. [3a] In some cases in past years extra-judicial killings were reprisals against civilians for LTTE attacks in which members of the security forces were killed or injured. [2e]

5.2.47 According to the US Department of State Report issued in March 2002, security

forces committed extra-judicial killings, including the killing of civilians, in connection with the conflict with the LTTE. [2e]

Torture

5.2.48 The police, STF, the army and the navy have been responsible for incidents of torture. Amnesty International refer to the many testimonies obtained from victims of torture, corroborating medical certificates, Supreme Court judgements in fundamental rights cases and reports from Government inquiry commissions. [3d] Tamil militants aligned with the former PA government forces also previously engaged in torture, as have the LTTE, who reportedly use torture on a routine basis. [2e] The prevalence of torture is intrinsically linked with other human rights violations, including disappearances. Many of the thousands of cases of disappearances reported from Sri Lanka since the early 1980s concern detainees alleged to have died under torture in police or army custody whose bodies were subsequently disposed of in secret. [3e]

5.2.49 As well as the use of torture in the context of the armed conflict, torture is also regularly reported to have been used to extract confessions from suspects in theft and other criminal cases. The police also use torture for the settling of personal disputes and this is closely linked with widespread corruption reported in the force and the nexus between the local police and local politicians. [3e]

5.2.50 According to Amnesty International, there are several contributing factors to the prevalence of torture in Sri Lanka. The Emergency Regulations (ERs) [which have now lapsed] and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) allow long term detention in police and army custody without having to bring detainees before a judicial authority. There are no standards in law setting out minimum detention conditions. The current safeguards laid down in law, such as the requirement that people arrested under the [former] ERs and the PTA can only be held in authorised places of detention, are not effectively enforced. Those held in authorised places of detention receive regular visits by delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Human Rights Commission, which reduce to some extent the risk of torture and disappearances. [3e]

5.2.51 Sri Lankan law contains strong provisions to prevent the extraction of confessions under torture. However, provisions in the ERs [which have now lapsed] and PTA make confessions to police officers above a certain rank admissible as evidence in court. According to Amnesty International, this constitutes an incentive to interrogating officers to obtain such confessions by any means, including torture. Moreover the burden of proving that a confession was extracted under torture is upon the person making such an allegation. [3e]

5.2.52 Testimonies obtained from victims of torture speak of the security forces abusing them in the following ways: general physical abuse such as slaps and kicks; having petrol poured on their faces; chilli powder applied to parts of the body; being repeatedly plunged in barrels of water; electric shocks; near suffocation with wet rags; burning with cigarettes; beatings with cricket bats and PVC pipes filled with something heavy such as sand, stones or cement; being suspended upside down, and beatings on the soles of the feet. Further extreme forms of torture include burning with melted polythene, cutting with knives and bayonets, drilling into feet and inserting nails into feet or other parts of the body. In most cases testimony was corroborated by medical evidence. This treatment occurred while the victims were being interrogated about suspected involvement with the LTTE. There were

also several reports of sexual abuse and rape by members of the security forces. [3a], [11a], [11b], [13], [2c] & [3e]

5.2.53 The Refugee Council refers to reports from Sri Lankan Judicial Medical Officers (Government appointed doctors instructed by the Supreme Court to investigate allegations of torture after petitions have been made by Tamil detainees), which document physical injuries and scars which are consistent with various methods of assault, including suspension, burns and beatings. [11a] The Supreme Court awarded compensation in 4 of the 10 cases of which the Refugee Council had details. No prosecutions were undertaken in any of these cases against the officials responsible for committing torture. [11b]

5.2.54 In Colombo, there are large numbers of arrests after explosions, assassinations and arms finds. A large percentage are released within 48 hours after their identity has been checked. There have been reports of ill treatment during this initial period, but there have been few reports of torture of people held for identity checks. [3e] Amnesty International mentions 4 cases of torture in Colombo during 1998. [14b] The Danish Immigration Service Report, published January 1999, states that a number of interviewees were consulted, including UNHCR, the Association for the Protection of Tamils, the Action Group for Tamils and the Law and Society Trust, who said that torture or other forms of maltreatment did not occur in the course of identity checks. The Civil Rights Movement said that there had been an improvement in the treatment of people during identity checks. [32] If someone is freed on bail, this will mean they are not or no longer regarded as a serious suspect. [14b]

5.2.55 The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture issued a report in June 2000 which sets out medical case studies of 49 Tamils (47 male, 2 female) who had been detained for varying lengths of time in Sri Lanka from January 1997 onwards. Medical evidence of torture was found in all of them. Most were in the age group 21-35 and had a range of occupations. Some of the Tamils had worked voluntarily for the LTTE, others had been conscripted by the LTTE, and others had assisted the LTTE but not voluntarily. The subjects of the case studies were detained either by the police in Colombo or by the army in the north. The Tamils described methods of torture similar to those set out above. [13]

5.2.56 Out of the 49 clients in the Medical Foundation case study, 9 claimed that the presence of scars led the authorities to conclude that the person detained had been fighting with the LTTE against government forces. Some of the case studies described how they were made to put on masks and identify newly arrested young men as being Tamil Tigers. They pointed out several at random although they did not recognise them, as they believed they would be assaulted otherwise. The Medical Foundation considers this to be a self-perpetuating cycle of abuse. [13]

5.2.57 In their 2000 report, the Medical Foundation point out the degree of involvement with the LTTE of their sample of 49 Tamils. 31% of the sample were forced to do occasional work for the LTTE, 16% worked voluntarily, 8% were forced to fight for the LTTE, and 4% were working full time for the LTTE. A further 4% were involved with other militant Tamil groups. This leaves 37% of the sample who had no personal involvement with the LTTE, but these may have been arrested because of family links to the LTTE. [13]

Government Action

5.2.58 The [former] People's Alliance (PA) Government which came to power in 1994, and in particular President Kumaratunga herself, resolved to improve the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. [14a] There are several domestic NGO human rights groups, including the Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), the University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna (UTHR-J), the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), and the Law and Society Trust (LST), that monitor civil and political liberties. There are no adverse regulations governing the activities of local and foreign NGOs and the Government generally co-operates with NGOs, with members of Parliament, and with other officials frequently participating in seminars and other events concerning human rights and humanitarian affairs. [2e]

5.2.59 Amnesty International has noted the marked improvement in the human rights situation in comparison with what it called the "widespread pattern of gross and systematic violations" of the past. Nevertheless Amnesty, in common with a number of other organisations, were concerned about continuing abuses, about the Government of Sri Lanka's apparent failure to live up to its stated commitment to human rights, and about signs that the Government may be reneging on its commitment to bring to justice the perpetrators of past human rights violations. [3a]

5.2.60 The Supreme Court and other courts have taken an unequivocal position on the question of torture and have awarded compensation to victims of torture. [6e] The Supreme Court can request the Inspector General of Police to initiate an investigation, and on completion, may refer the matter to the Attorney-General for prosecution. [6d] Courts have granted awards ranging from 14,200 to 182,500 rupees. However, most cases take 2 years or more to move through the courts [2e]

5.2.61 The Government has taken steps to ensure that investigations in which the accused were police officers and that were dealt with by the police, were independent. New special units had been set up to carry out investigations and monitor investigations that were being conducted elsewhere. Special units of the Crown and State Counsel had been set up in the Attorney-General's Department to supervise the investigations that were being carried out. [6d]

5.2.62 The General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 51 Division of the Army in Jaffna introduced measures to prevent "disappearances" and torture. Amnesty reported that there was general agreement among the population in Jaffna that an improvement in the human rights situation had come about as a result of these measures. The GOC established a special investigative unit consisting of members of the Military Police to investigate 379 complaints of disappearances. [3b]

5.2.63 Amnesty was also encouraged by several human rights training programmes for the security forces, including courses organised by a Directorate of Humanitarian Law set up by the Commander of the Army in May 1997. [3b]

5.2.64 In one of the few cases where official action was taken, on 1 February 1998 in Thambalagamam in Trincomalee district, police and home guards allegedly killed 8 Tamil civilians, possibly in reprisal for the LTTE bombing of the Temple of the Tooth a week earlier. The Government arrested police officers and home guards, charging 4 with murder and 17 with unlawful assembly. [2e]

5.2.65 Amnesty International was invited in October 1998 by the Sri Lankan Attorney

General to send an expert to attend the investigation of reports of a mass grave in Jaffna. [8c] Amnesty International and Physicians for Human Rights, who attended the exhumation at Chemmani in June 1999, praised the Sri Lankan Government for taking this first step in investigating human rights abuses by the security forces. [8q]

5.2.66 A BBC News OnLine report from 11 June 2001 quoted the commander of Sri Lanka's armed forces, General Lionel Balagalle, as appealing for help in teaching soldiers the Tamil language to facilitate communications with civilians in the conflict areas. He was speaking at the launch of a 10-day training course for senior army officers on human rights and humanitarian law. The commander admitted that the majority of Sinhala and Tamil youth had no common language, but said the army were trying to rectify this by giving soldiers 23 days of spoken Tamil language training. He appealed to the authorities and NGOs for help to enhance the training, citing language misunderstandings as one of the reasons for arbitrary arrest. The Sri Lankan army said it was offering more than 60 senior officers training in humanitarian law in conjunction with the ICRC, looking at areas like the laws of armed conflict and rules of engagement. The ICRC conducted a similar training programme inside LTTE-controlled territory earlier in June 2001 in which about 70 LTTE cadres, both men and women, were educated about the basic rules of behaviour in combat. [35f]

5.2.67 An article appearing in the Sunday Times (of Sri Lanka) of 8 July 2001 reported that the SLA had launched a major drive to instil an appreciation of human rights and fair conduct. At a ceremony in June 2001, 60 of the most senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) of the SLA pledged to abide by the rules of international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict. This oath was taken at the conclusion of a ten day residential course on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights conducted at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute (SLFI). Major General Lohan Goonewardena, Deputy Chief of Staff of the SLA, said the pledge to observe the Rules of War would be introduced to the entire rank and file within two months. Every soldier and officer will take the oath before their commanding officer and a signed copy of the oath will go into their personal file. The course was organised by the ICRC, the University of Colombo, and the SLFI. [40]

5.2.68 In July 2001, President Kumaratunga appointed a "Truth Commission on Ethnic Violence" to probe the July 1983 riots that left hundreds of Tamils killed. The three-member panel, headed by former Chief Justice S. Sharvananda, will also investigate the nature, causes and extent of human rights and destruction of property in the course of the ethnic violence from 1981 to 1984, with special reference to July 1983. [7a]

5.2.69 In November 2001, the Sri Lankan Army created the Directorate of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in the Sri Lankan Army. The directorate is charged with coordinating all human rights activities for the army from ICRC training classes to overseeing the Human Rights Cells that are assigned throughout the military. The SLA also states that all of its personnel have completed the appropriate training and pledged to adhere to the "rules of international Humanitarian Law." The armed forces operate under written rules of engagement that severely restrict the shelling, bombardment, or other use of firepower against civilian-occupied areas such as villages. [2e]

5.2.70 In March 2002, formal charges were brought against 41 people allegedly involved in the Bandarawela Bindunuwewa massacre of October 2000. Nineteen of those charged were policemen. [8o]

5.2.71 In February 2002, police arrested two sons of former Power Minister Anuruddha

Ratwatte in connection with the massacre of 10 Muslim opposition supporters after elections in December 2001. Their father, who is the uncle of President Kumaratunga, was remanded the previous week. The killings in the central highland town of Madawala sparked riots, forcing the government to impose a curfew to keep a lid on tensions between Muslims and Sinhalese. [7f]

5.2.72 Human rights education is also conducted by local and national NGOs. The Institute of Human Rights (IHR), a local NGO, runs a diploma course. The programme of study, which lasts three and a half months, deals with a variety of topics concerning human rights. Legal workshops are conducted island-wide, so as to spread knowledge of human rights together with a basic legal understanding throughout a wide cross-section of society. Fundamental rights, arrest and detention, bail, torture, Muslim law, child rights, labour law, women's rights, criminal law, international covenants and the Consumer Protection Act are a few of the topics covered in these workshops. The human rights awareness programme has been successful in achieving its objective of bringing awareness to the general public of human rights issues. The programme is conducted in Tamil or Sinhala depending on the area in which it is held. Among those benefiting from the human rights education provided by IHR are school-leavers, employers, police officers and the armed forces. Radio programmes in Tamil and Sinhala, designed to educate the listener in basic law and human rights, are broadcast live over the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation on Thursdays at 7:30pm. [39]

The Human Rights Commission

5.2.73 The Human Rights Commission (HRC) was established by Act of Parliament in 1996 [6c] and started work in March 1997 [6a]. It has monitoring, investigative and advisory powers in relation to human rights. There are no time limits for filing a complaint before the HRC. [6c]

5.2.74 The HRC is empowered to investigate an allegation of infringement of fundamental rights, and to recommend the prosecution of the person infringing those rights. The HRC may monitor the welfare of detainees by regular inspection of places of detention. All arrests and detentions under the [former] Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act must be reported to the HRC within 48 hours of arrest. [6c] The security forces often ignore these safeguards. [2e] However, according to the Danish Immigration Service Report on their fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka, published January 1999, the Human Rights Commission themselves noted that the rule requiring the police to inform it within 48 hours was in the main being observed and there had been improvements in this respect. [32] A police officer can be prosecuted if he or she does not follow these guidelines, though this is rarely enforced. There is a monthly meeting between the HRC and security forces to discuss these matters, and a report is prepared detailing any discrepancies and possible repercussions are discussed. [39]

5.2.75 The HRC visited over 2,000 police stations and over 500 detention facilities during 2001. [2e] These visits can be unannounced, so there is effectively 24-hour cover, unless there is a curfew in force in a particular area. [39]

5.2.76 The HRC has over 4,000 cases of alleged human rights abuse pending. Human rights observers believe that the work of the HRC has been hampered by a lack of strong leadership within the organisation. The establishment of the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) in 1998 strengthened claims of the HRC's

ineffectiveness since the responsibilities of the CIUAH fall within the HRC's mandate. New commissioners were appointed in March 2000. Activists have expressed some satisfaction with the new leadership, especially for its prompt investigation into the Bindunuwewa massacre. [2e]

The Human Rights Task Force

5.2.77 The HRC took over the work of the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF). This had been established in 1991 as an independent organisation with the authority to conduct regular inspections of places of detention, maintain an accurate register of detainees and to ensure that fundamental rights of detainees were respected. HRTF officers were able to make unannounced visits to army camps and police stations and had unrestricted access to detainees. [6a]

Committee to Inquire into Undue Arrest and Harassment

5.2.78 In July 1998, the President established the Committee to Inquire into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH). The committee, which includes Tamil representatives, examines complaints of arrest and harassment by security forces and takes remedial action as needed. The Committee received more than 1,200 complaints by the end of 2001. [2e]

Commissions of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal and Disappearances

5.2.79 The Sri Lankan Government appointed 3 commissions in January 1995 to inquire into and report on involuntary removals and disappearances from 1 January 1988. The mandate expired on 31 May 1997. Each commission had jurisdiction over a geographical area and was responsible for examining allegations of disappearances and identifying the legal action which could be taken. Interim reports were sent to the President containing names of people responsible for disappearances. These findings were forwarded to the Inspector-General of Police for further investigation. The Inspector-General was directed to take action against offending police officers. [6c]

5.2.80 The final reports were submitted to the President in September 1997. [6c] The commissions investigated cases of disappearance, most of which occurred during the 1988-89 period of the JVP uprising. The commissions found evidence that 16,742 persons disappeared after having been involuntarily removed from their homes, in most cases by the security forces. [2e]

5.2.81 The reports have been published and submitted to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, which has been invited to visit Sri Lanka. A ministerial committee is looking into ways to implement the Commissions' recommendations, including those on compensation and prosecution. By May 1998, 188 cases had been referred to the Attorney-General's Department; specific action had been taken on 4 cases; there had been 20 indictments; and 14 cases had been dismissed. [6d] By the end of 2000, the Attorney-General had opened approximately 1,175 files and referred 262 indictments to the high courts and 86 complaints to magistrates involving 583 members of the security forces. Hearings and trials in at least 250 of those cases had begun. Of these, the Attorney-General's office successfully prosecuted 4 cases by the end of 2001, and continued to prosecute other cases as evidence became available. [2e]

5.2.82 In July 1998, a new commission with island-wide jurisdiction was appointed to

investigate and report on about 11,000 complaints left uninvestigated by the earlier commissions. [18]

International Committee of the Red Cross

5.2.83 The ICRC started humanitarian functions in Sri Lanka in 1990 to assist those affected by the war. The ICRC is granted free access to all places of detention, and may interview detainees in private. [6a] Amnesty International has testimonies of former detainees which confirm that an intervention by the ICRC resulted in detainees being provided medical treatment or being transferred out of the custody of the law enforcement officers responsible for torture. [3e]

5.2.84 ICRC personnel in Sri Lanka include 51 expatriate and 349 locally hired staff. Operations focus on areas where there is (or has been) fighting, particularly the Vanni, the Jaffna peninsula and the Eastern Province. They assist internally displaced civilians and resident populations whose livelihood, access to medical care, or contacts with family members have been disrupted by the fighting. The ICRC also acts as a neutral humanitarian intermediary between the warring parties, works to persuade combatants to respect the rights of civilians, and visits persons detained in connection with the conflict. [34a]

5.2.85 Most ICRC assistance and tracing activities are carried out in conjunction with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS). The Austrian Red Cross continues to run a delegated water and sanitation project in the Eastern Province, and the Canadian Red Cross maintains support to SLRCS medical activities in the Vanni. [34a]

5.2.86 Between January and September 2000, the ICRC, among other activities, facilitated negotiations to allow cross-line transport, escorted food convoys across front lines, and protected a passenger vessel shuttling civilians between Trincomalee and Jaffna; collected allegations of abuse committed against the civilian population, submitting them in a confidential manner to the parties concerned in order to remind them of their responsibility to respect civilians and combatants who are *hors combat*; distributed 4,534 Red Cross messages written by people living in combat areas, located 199 persons who had been declared missing by their families, and organised 34 family reunifications for vulnerable individuals separated from their closest relatives; facilitated the return to both parties to the conflict the mortal remains of 322 combatants who had fallen on enemy territory; visited 2,783 detainees held under Sri Lankan authority, financing 702 family visits for them and helping released detainees return home; visited 33 persons held by the LTTE, organised a family visit for 15 of them and assisted in the release and return home of 5 of these detainees; distributed essential household items to over 18,000 vulnerable displaced persons in the Vanni and on the Jaffna peninsula; in the Vanni, provided an average of over 18,000 consultations monthly through 5 mobile health teams and 26 primary health centres run with the SLRCS in a project delegated to the Canadian Red Cross, and in the Eastern Province through 2 ICRC/SLRCS mobile health teams; on the Jaffna peninsula supported SLRCS medical teams treating over 5,000 displaced people; transported 1,400 patients by boat from Jaffna to Colombo for specialist medical care; and made presentations on international humanitarian law to over 5,600 military personnel. [34a]

5.2.87 The Sri Lankan Government continued to give the ICRC unhindered access to approximately 160 detention centers, police stations, and army camps recognized officially as places of detention. Such visits played an important role in enabling the ICRC to monitor the human rights practices of the security forces. Due to the lapsing of the ER in July 200

the total number of persons detained in military bases at any one time has been dramatically reduced, with the military making fewer arrests and transferring detainees to police facilities more quickly than in previous years. [2e]

Centre for the Study of Human Rights

5.2.88 The CSHR launched a programme in June 1993 to provide human rights education for the armed forces and the police with a view to sensitising them to the value of human rights and to point out the limits of their powers. Seminars and workshops were conducted for new assistant superintendents of police and for naval officers. [6a]

Prosecution of Security Force Personnel

5.2.89 Amnesty International state that as of June 1999, no members of the security forces had been prosecuted under criminal law for committing torture, despite the fact that torture was made a criminal offence by the Convention Against Torture Act 1994. [3e] The Supreme Court has defined torture very broadly to include both physical and mental pain. [6a] Some personnel have been sentenced to long-term imprisonment for their involvement in disappearances and extra-judicial executions. [3e] At the end of 2001, the government of Sri Lanka was investigating 597 Security Force personnel for possible human rights violations. [2e]

5.2.90 A report issued by the Geneva based Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers in September 1998, stated that steps to punish those responsible for unlawful killings had been "manifestly inadequate" and that a culture of impunity had developed. At the date of the jurists' mission to Sri Lanka (1997) no member of the security forces had been convicted of murder. [7x]

5.2.91 In February 1998, 21 homeguard troopers, 19 policemen and a civilian who were suspected of being involved in the killing of 8 Tamil youths were remanded in custody. [7t]

5.2.92 In July 1998, 5 soldiers and a policeman were sentenced to death, having been found guilty of the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy after she was detained at an army checkpoint in Jaffna in 1996. Her mother, brother and a neighbour who went looking for her were also killed. [7v] One of the convicted (former Lance Corporal Somaratne Rajapakse [2e]) stated that he was prepared to identify the mass graves of 400 Tamils who allegedly disappeared in Jaffna. [7w]

5.2.93 In August 1998, 5 senior police officers, including a Deputy Inspector General, were sent on compulsory leave after the report of the presidential commission established to investigate allegations of torture and extra-judicial executions at a government-run detention centre at the Batalanda Housing Estate near Colombo implicated them in the torture and disappearances of a large number of youths in the late 1980s. [18]

5.2.94 In February 1999 a retired school principal and 6 soldiers were sentenced to terms of up to 10 years imprisonment for abducting 25 students, mostly from Embilipitiya Central College in southern Sri Lanka. The students disappeared between August 1989 and January 1990 after the school principal gave the army a list of those he thought were members of the People's Liberation Front. A brigadier and a major were acquitted as there was insufficient evidence to convict. [8g]

5.2.102 Outside Colombo, in January 1998, a bomb exploded in Kandy, killing 16 and damaging the country's holiest Buddhist shrine. [7s]

Abuses by pro-Government Tamil Militants

5.2.103 Former terrorist Tamil militant groups aligned with the former PA Government have committed extrajudicial killings in the eastern province and the Vavuniya area in the north. The military wing of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Razeek group were responsible for a number of killings. The security forces previously armed and used these militias to provide information, to help identify LTTE insurgents and, in some cases, fight in military operations against the insurgents. The exact size of these militias is impossible to ascertain but they probably total fewer than 2,000 persons. Although the army in some instances took steps to convert Tamil militia groups into regular army units, military oversight of these groups remained inadequate, and complaints about them continued, particularly in Vavuniya and Batticaloa. The militias gain access to internally displaced persons (IDPs) transit camps (mainly in Vavuniya) through a variety of means, including bribery and threats. It was impossible to determine the number of victims because of the secrecy with which these groups operated. Those killed by these militants included both LTTE operatives and civilians who failed to comply with extortion demands. [2e]

5.2.104 PLOTE and TELO have detained Tamils in the north and east, without handing them over to the police. PLOTE and TELO have also resorted to extortion on a wide scale. [3a] TELO and the Razeek group (which is affiliated to the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) have been responsible for torture in the east of Sri Lanka, while PLOTE is reported to have inflicted torture on detainees in Vavuniya. [3e]

5.2.105 In May 1999, the Government forbade these groups from carrying arms in public and from stockpiling weapons. The killing of the military leader of PLOTE in September 1999 led to a reduced number of complaints against the group. [2c]

5.2.106 A report on the TamilNet website dated 25 March 2002 confirmed that Tamil paramilitary groups operating with the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) had begun handing over a section of the weapons in their possession in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Weapons were handed over from the EPDP, PLOTE, EPRLF (Suresh wing) and EPRLF (Varathar wing). [37]

Up-Country Tamils

5.2.107 There are approximately 1 million Tamils of comparatively recent Indian origin living in Sri Lanka. [2e] They were brought over from Tamil Nadu in India by the British colonial government to work on the estates in the central highlands. They are also known as "tea Tamils", [14a] "hill Tamils" or "Indian Tamils". [2e] The highest concentration of up-country Tamils is in the district of Nuwara Eliya, and they are also present in the districts of Matale, Kegalle, Kandy, Badulla, Ratnapura, Moneragala, Galle and Matara. [27]

5.2.108 The 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act denied them nationality and stripped up-country Tamils of all civil rights. In 1964 (the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact) and in 1986, Sri Lanka and India agreed to extend citizenship to some of the up-country Tamils. Of the approximately 975,000 up-country Tamils, 422,500 received Indian nationality and moved to India, and 469,000 obtained Sri Lankan nationality. [14a]

5.2.109 There was a residue of 85,000 who opted for Indian citizenship, but remained in Sri Lanka. These people remain stateless and are unable to obtain a passport or own land. [14a]

5.2.110 This residue is one of the most neglected groups in Sri Lanka. They have been largely excluded from the political process and from employment opportunities in the government and private sector because of their statelessness. [16a] An up-country Tamil can obtain a temporary travel document (emergency certificate), with a limited period of validity, with which to travel to India and return to Sri Lanka. [14b] During 1999, the Government introduced a programme to begin registering up-country Tamils - 15,300 initially received identity cards. [2e]

5.2.111 The Government has stated that none of the up-country Tamils would be forced to leave Sri Lanka. [2e]

5.2.112 Politically, up-country Tamils are represented by the Ceylon Workers' Congress and the Up-Country People's Front. [14a]

Indigenous People

5.2.113 The country's indigenous people, known as Veddas, number fewer than 1,000. Some prefer to maintain their isolated traditional way of life, and they are protected by the Constitution. There are no legal restrictions on their participation in the political or economic life of the nation. In August 1998, the Government fulfilled a long-standing Vedda demand when the President issued an order granting Veddas the right to hunt and gather in specific protected forest areas. The executive order granted the Veddas the freedom to protect their culture and to carry on their traditional way of life without hindrance. Under a pilot programme Veddas received special identity cards to enable their use of these forest areas. However, some Veddas still complain that they are being pushed off of their land. Although many Veddas continue to pursue a traditional way of life, visits by tourists have become an important source of income for the community. [2e]

Homosexuals

5.2.114 According to the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) World Legal Survey, homosexual acts between men, regardless of age, are prohibited under Section 365a of the Penal Code with a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment. Same-sex female relationships are not mentioned in laws covering sexual activity. [41]

Political Activists

The JVP

5.2.115 The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) is a radical left wing party which in 1987 came out against the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. It began a campaign of strikes, attacks and killings of public officials and members of the police and army. The violence reached its peak in 1988-90. A ruthless campaign to eliminate the JVP was launched, with death squads responsible for abductions and killings of suspected JVP supporters. The violence gradually subsided after November 1989 when the JVP leadership was eliminated. [14a]

5.2.116 There was a brief revival of JVP activities in 1990, but the Government clamped down on this firmly. Reports of disappearances and extra-judicial executions of JVP members decreased after 1990, and ceased in 1993. [14a]

5.2.117 In the 1997 local elections the JVP won 101 seats on various local councils. [14a] In the Southern Provincial Council election of June 1999, the JVP won 7 of the 55 seats. [8n] In the most recent general election (December 2001), the JVP increased their number of seats from 5 to 15. [8y]

5.2.118 Since 1994 there has been no further politically motivated prosecution of JVP members. They are now only prosecuted under the ordinary law and only for serious offences punishable under the Sri Lankan Penal Code. [14a]

5.2.119 By 1996 all JVP members in custody had been tried and were serving their sentences, or had been released for lack of evidence. [14a]

5.3 Human Rights - Other Issues

Immigrants and Emigrants Act

5.3.1 The Immigrants and Emigrants Act was first introduced in 1949. Section 45 lists various categories of people who are guilty of offences under the Act, which include anyone who forges, alters or tampers with any passport, or has in their possession any forged passport, or who uses such a document. The section sets out the punishment, which consists of a fine, or a period of imprisonment, or both. Section 45A provides punishments for those found guilty of facilitating illegal entry into Sri Lanka. [20]

5.3.2 The Immigrants and Emigrants (Amendment) Act was passed in July 1998. During the passage of the Bill the Sri Lankan Immigration Minister told Parliament that the amendment was designed to combat "the crime of illicit trafficking of persons from Sri Lanka." The Minister stated that the diplomatic missions of various western countries had made representations to the Sri Lankan authorities about organised groups engaged in the business of securing illicit entry of Sri Lankans to their countries. [20]

5.3.3 The Amendment Act increases the fines and the term of imprisonment which may be imposed on those found guilty under the Act, and makes the term of imprisonment mandatory. The Act disallows the imposition of a suspended sentence, and certain offences under the Act are non-bailable. [20]

5.3.4 Contrary to what is stated in the Organisation Suisse d'aide aux Réfugiés report of 31 May 1999, the Immigrants and Emigrants Act has no retroactive effect. [14b]

5.3.5. According to the report produced by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published 30 September 1999, prosecution on the grounds of illegal emigration is as a rule only pursued at the time of emigration. In the case of immigration, the Criminal Investigation Department in practice will only proceed to investigate the illegal emigration if the returning person is still in possession of the forged travel document or if there are other indications that the interested party has emigrated illegally (e.g. if the interested party declares this him or

herself). A rejected asylum seeker who is returned to Sri Lanka does not always have to fear being prosecuted under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act unless he/she is entering on a false travel document. The immigration authorities can question someone on arrival about their outward journey, but they generally do not have access to sufficient means of proof regarding the emigration. [14b] It is not technically possible for the Sri Lankan authorities to determine whether someone has previously emigrated illegally: the registration of personal data for Sri Lankans is not computerised, nor is there a computerised database of the travel documents issued. Asylum seekers expelled by the Netherlands for example, are on arrival in Sri Lanka, in possession of a valid travel document, usually a recently issued laissez-passer from the Sri Lankan Embassy: thus such returnees are not in violation of the Immigrants and Emigrants Act. [14c]

5.3.6 With regard to the burden of proof in the Immigrants and Emigrants Act, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs state that, unless otherwise specified, the general definitions of the Sri Lankan Criminal Code are applied (i.e. the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Evidence Ordinance). According to these general definitions, the burden of proof of a violation of a criminal law rests with the public prosecutor, thus not on the suspect. [14c]

5.3.7 On the fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka in July 2001, Home Office officials were told by the CID that an Anti-Human Smuggling Bureau headed by the Superintendent of Police was set up in June 2001 following discussions with Heads of Missions at various Embassies in Colombo. This was operating at Bandaranaike International Airport and is manned 24 hours a day. Home Office officials were told that the CID had had a very good recent detection rate of illegal migrants at the airport. However, the CID considered there was a need for greater detection of forged visas. Returnees who are arriving at the airport who are unable to establish their identity satisfactorily are brought before a magistrate within 24 hours and granted bail until CID have investigated the returnees circumstances. CID drops almost all cases once they have identified the person. [39]

ANNEX A: MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANISATIONS

ALL CEYLON TAMIL CONGRESS (ACTC)

Founded in 1944 and aims to secure Tamil self-determination. Won one seat in the general election of October 2000.

BAHAJUNA NIDAHAS PERAMUNA

Formed in 1990 and is a splinter group of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party.

CEYLON WORKERS' CONGRESS (CWC)

Founded in 1939 and represents the interests of workers, mainly of Indian Tamil origin, on tea plantations.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF SRI LANKA (CPSL)

Founded in 1943 and advocates the establishment of a socialist society. It supports the national unity of Sri Lanka.

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (DPLF)

Has operated as a national political party since 1988 and is the political wing of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). Won 1 seat in the 2001 general election.

DEMOCRATIC UNITED NATIONAL FRONT (DUNF)

Founded in 1991 by a dissident group of UNP politicians.

DEMOCRATIC UNITED NATIONAL LALITH FRONT (DUNLF)

Split from the DUNF in 1994.

DEMOCRATIC WORKERS' CONGRESS (DWC)

Formed in 1939 as a trade union and in 1978 as a political party. Aims to eliminate discrimination against the Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans of recent Indian origin.

DESHAPRIYA JANATHA VIYAPARAYA (DJV)

(Patriotic People's Movement) Militant Sinhalese group associated with the JVP. Now defunct.

DESHA VIMUKTHI JANATHA PARTY (DVJP)

(National Liberation People's Party) Has operated as a national political party since 1988. A constituent part of the People's Alliance.

EELAM NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC LIBERATION FRONT (ENDLF)

A Tamil group which was operating during the IPKF period, and thereafter became defunct.

EELAM PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (EPDP)

A Tamil group formed in 1986. Supports the People's Alliance and won 9 of the 10 Parliamentary seats in Jaffna in the 1994 general election. Won 4 seats in the general election of October 2000, and agreed to help the PA form a coalition government, along with the NUA. Representation dropped to 2 MPs at the 2001 general election.

EELAM PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY LIBERATION FRONT (EPRLF)

Founded in 1981, this is a left of centre Tamil rights group. The EPRLF now functions as two groups - the Perumal faction and the Suresh faction.

EELAVAR DEMOCRATIC FRONT previously known as the EELAM REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION OF STUDENTS (EROS)

A Tamil separatist group formed in 1975. Contested the 1989 and 1994 general elections. The EDF is also described as the political wing of EROS.

EKSATH LANKA JATHIKA PERAMUNA (ELJP)

Founded by former members of the UNP in 1985. Now defunct.

JANATHA VIMUKTHI PERAMUNA (JVP) (People's Liberation Front)

Formed in 1964 and was banned following a coup attempt in 1971. Regained legal status in 1977, but banned again in August 1983. Regained legal status in May 1988. A Marxist, Sinhalese group which has been effectively eradicated as a result of military action in 1989-90. Won the third highest number of seats (16) at the December 2001 general election.

LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP)

(Lanka Equal Society Party) Founded in 1935. Trotskyist. It is a constituent party of the People's Alliance.

LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE)

The main Tamil separatist organisation, commonly known as the "Tamil Tigers". Founded in 1974 and is currently led by Velupillai Prabakharan. The LTTE controls a large part of Sri Lanka's north and east. The LTTE runs a parallel administration to that of the elected government. Currently engaged in a peace process with the UNP government.

LTTE FRONT ORGANISATIONS INCLUDE: -

World Tamil Association (WTA)

World Tamil Movement (WTM)

Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT)

The Ellalan Force

The Sangilliyan Force

MAHAJANA EKSATH PERAMUNA (MEP)

(People's United Front) Founded in 1956. A left-wing party with Buddhist and Sinhalese support.

MUSLIM UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (MULF)

Operated as a national political party since 1988 and was set up to secure Muslim and Tamil rights under the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord of July 1987.

NATIONAL UNITY ALLIANCE (NUA)

A mainly Muslim party that won four seats at the October 2000 general election. Agreed to help the PA form a coalition government along with the EPDP.

NATIONAL WORKERS' CONGRESS (NWC)

Formed after the 1994 general election.

NATIONAL WORKERS' UNION (NWU)

Founded in 1970 as a trade union party.

NAVA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (NSSP)

(New Equal Society Party) A Trotskyist party founded in 1977.

PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (PA)

Formed in 1993 as a left wing alliance which includes the LSSP, the SLFP and the SLMP. This was the ruling party in Sri Lanka from August 1994 until December 2001.

PEOPLE'S FRONT OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS (PFLT)

Founded in 1989. Political wing of the LTTE.

PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ORGANISATION OF TAMIL EELAM (PLOTE)

Formed in 1980 as a breakaway group from the LTTE. A Tamil militant party which advocates a separate socialist Tamil state, but supported the UNP and PA Government's military operations against the LTTE. Its political wing is the Democratic People's Liberation Front (see above).

PODUJANA EKSATH PERAMUNA (PEP)

This is the Sinhalese term for the PA, and both represent one and the same party.

SINGHALAYE MAHA SAMMATHA BHUMIPUTRA PAKSAYE

(Sinhalese Sons of the Soil Party) Formed by a former naval rating who attempted to assassinate the former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, during a navy honour guard in Colombo in 1987.

SINGHALAYE NITHAHAS PERAMUNA (Sinhalese Freedom Front)

A nationalist, Buddhist party formed in 1994.

SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP)

Formed in 1951. A democratic socialist party. It has been one of the two main political parties in Sri Lanka, the other being the United National Party.

of the two main parties in Sri Lanka and had been in power for 17 years when it was defeated in the 1994 elections. Regained power in the December 2001 elections.

UP-COUNTRY PEOPLE'S FRONT

Represents the interests of workers, mainly of Indian Tamil origin, on tea plantations.

ANNEX B: PROMINENT PEOPLE - PAST AND PRESENT

CHANDRIKA BANDARANAIKE KUMARATUNGA

President of Sri Lanka. Daughter of Solomon and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Appointed Prime Minister in August 1994 at the head of the People's Alliance Government. She contested the November 1994 presidential elections, which she won. Survived a suicide bomb attack in December 1999 and was re-elected President a few days later.

SIRIMAVO BANDARANAIKE

Widow of Solomon Bandaranaike, the founder of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and former Prime Minister who was assassinated in 1959. Assumed the leadership of the SLFP after her husband's assassination and became Prime Minister. She was defeated in 1965, but was Prime Minister again between 1970 and 1977, and for a third term between 1994 and 2000. She resigned in August 2000, at the age of 84, citing ill health as one of her reasons. She died on 10 October 2000 shortly after casting her vote in the country's general election.

JUNIUS JAYAWARDENE

Appointed Prime Minister when the UNP won the 1977 general election. In 1978 he became the country's first executive President following a Constitutional amendment. In 1987 he signed the Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord with Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister. He remained President until January 1989.

VELUPILLAI PRABHAKARAN

Leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In 1992 he was charged *in absentia* in Madras in connection with the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. In 1997 he was charged with other militants with more than 700 criminal acts of terrorism by the Sri Lankan Government.

RANASINGHE PREMADASA

UNP Prime Minister of Sri Lanka under President Jayawardene. He was elected President in December 1988 and sworn in the following month. He was assassinated by a bomb explosion in Colombo on 1 May 1993. The LTTE were blamed though they denied involvement.

RATNASIRI WICKREMANAYAKE

Became Prime Minister after the resignation of Sirimavo Bandaranaike in August 2000. Was sworn in for a second term after the general election of 10 October 2000. Succeeded as leader of the opposition PA in February 2002 by Mahinda Rajapakse.

RANIL WICKREMASINGHE

Minister of Industries, Science and Technology under President Premadasa, he was appointed Prime Minister following the latter's assassination in 1993. As leader of the UNP, he again became Prime Minister in December 2001 after his party's victory in the general election.

ANNEX C: CHRONOLOGY**1948**

Ceylon gains independence from the United Kingdom.

1956

Sri Lanka Freedom Party wins the general election; Solomon Bandaranaike becomes Prime Minister.

1959

Sirimavo Bandaranaike succeeds her husband as SLFP leader and Prime Minister.

1971

A JVP uprising is suppressed.

1972

The country becomes known as Sri Lanka.

1976

Formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front, calling for a separate Tamil state.

1977

General election is held, won by the UNP. Jayawardene becomes Prime Minister. Civil unrest between Sinhalese and Tamils.

1978

New Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka comes into force.

Jayawardene becomes the country's first executive President. The Tamil language is recognised in the Constitution.

1979-83

Continuing ethnic violence and the imposition of a state of emergency.

1982

October: Jayawardene re-elected as President

December: referendum held to seek agreement to prolong the life of Parliament until 1989.

1983-4

State of emergency declared and mounting Tamil terrorist activity.

1986

Further violence in the north of Sri Lanka and bomb attacks in Colombo.

1986-7

Government offensives launched against the militant Tamils in the north and east.

April 1987: Terrorist attacks against the civil population.

29 July 1987: Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord signed. Indian Peace Keeping Force arrive.

October 1987: IPKF attack the LTTE and regain control of Jaffna. Re-emergence of the JVP which launched an anti-accord campaign.

1988

Presidential elections, won by the UNP candidate, Premadasa.

1989

State of emergency, in force since May 1983, repealed. The UNP win the February general elections. IPKF begins its withdrawal from Sri Lanka. State of emergency re-imposed in June in response to renewed JVP violence.

1989-90

JVP effectively destroyed as a political force by Sri Lankan security forces.

1990

March: the last troops of the IPKF leave Sri Lanka. LTTE hostilities renewed and Government offensive launched against Tamil strongholds in the Jaffna peninsula.

1991

Further violence and bomb attacks. Assassination of the senior cabinet minister, Wijeratne.

LTTE proscribed in India following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the former Indian Prime Minister.

1992

Massacre of Muslim villagers by suspected LTTE guerrillas in the north east.

1993

Assassination of the DUNF leader Athulathmudali, and of President Premadasa.

1994

16 August: General election and defeat of UNP Government. Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed Prime Minister, leading the People's Alliance.

9 November: Presidential election. Mrs Kumaratunga is elected, and her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, is appointed Prime Minister.

1995

Peace talks held with the LTTE, but soon break down. Major offensives launched in the Jaffna peninsula and the town of Jaffna is recaptured.

1996

Escalation in LTTE terrorist violence. 100 killed and 1,400 injured in a bomb attack on the Central Bank in Colombo. State of emergency extended to the whole country.

1997

March: The Government is successful in the local elections, which is seen as an endorsement of its devolution plans.

July: The state of emergency in the south of the country is lifted.

1998

26 January: The Government banned the LTTE after a bomb attack on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy.

29 January: Local elections held in the recaptured Tamil areas.

4 August: State of Emergency imposed on the whole country, and the provincial elections are postponed.

December: End of Operation Jayasikuru and launch of Operation Rivi Bala.

1999

January: Provincial elections held in North West Province amidst violence and reports of fraud, vote-rigging and intimidation.

The Supreme Court rules that the President's postponement of the provincial elections in August 1998 was unconstitutional. Elections held on 6 April, and the Southern Provincial Council elections in June. The PA win 6 of the councils.

March: Operation Rana Gosa launched.

November: Heavy fighting between LTTE and Government forces. Hundreds killed and LTTE recaptures territory previously lost.

December: President Kumaratunga survives an assassination attempt and is re-elected President three days later.

2000

January-August: Efforts at brokering peace with the LTTE are discussed by the two main political parties.

April-May: LTTE capture the strategic Elephant Pass and close in on Jaffna.

May: Due to the precarious military situation, the authorities put the country on a war footing and assume sweeping new powers under the Public Security Act.

May-September: The Sri Lankan Army prevent the LTTE from capturing the whole of the Jaffna peninsula and go on the offensive.

10 October: General Election held. The PA retains power but falls short of a majority. The PA forms a coalition government after support from the EPDP and NUA. Sirimavo Bandaranaike dies on polling day, shortly after casting her vote. Ratnasiri Wickremanayake is sworn in as Prime Minister for a second term, having replaced Mrs Bandaranaike in August 2000.

24 December: The LTTE announced a unilateral month-long cease-fire. This is later extended for a third time until 24 April 2001.

2001

28 February: The LTTE are among 21 militant groups proscribed in the United Kingdom.

23 April: The LTTE announce the end of their four-month cease-fire, blaming the government for the failure of peace efforts.

July: The Emergency Regulations (ERs) are lapsed.

24 July: The LTTE attack Katunayake Air Force Base and the adjacent Bandaranaike International Airport. 14 LTTE cadres and 7 military personnel are killed, and military aircraft and passenger planes destroyed.

July-September: President Kumaratunga suspends Parliament after the PA coalition loses its majority.

5 December 2001: General Election held. The UNP obtains 109 seats, thereby defeating the ruling PA who came second with 77 seats. As leader of the UNP, Ranil Wickremasinghe becomes the new Prime Minister with Chandrika Kumaratunga continuing as President. Mahinda Rajapakse later succeeds Ratnasiri Wickremanayake as leader of the PA.

24 December 2001: The Sri Lankan government announced a month-long cease-fire, reciprocating an earlier unilateral declaration by the LTTE.

December 2001: All barriers, barricades and checkpoints removed in Colombo.

2002

January 2002: Restrictions eased on movement in and out of Vavuniya.

20 January 2002: The LTTE announces an extension of the cease-fire until 24 February 2002. The government reciprocates the following day.

13 February 2002: The government lifts all restrictions on the movement of medicines and medical equipment to the north, although stocks would be monitored at checkpoints for security reasons.

22 February 2002: An announcement was made that the Sri Lankan government and LTTE had signed a permanent cease-fire, ending 19 years of civil war.

March 2002: The UNP win an unprecedented landslide victory in local polls, taking 217 councils out of the 222 that held elections.

2 April 2002: Nordic observers begin monitoring the cease-fire.

April 2002: The LTTE opens a political office in a government-held area in the north.

April 2002: The strategic A9 highway is opened for the first time in 12 years, linking the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the country.

10 April 2002: LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran gives his first press conference for 12 years.

13 April 2002: The LTTE sign a landmark pact with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC).

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