

Press Release

Expulsions of Tamils from Colombo

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International Federation for Human Rights

Paris, 11th June, 2007 - The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) expresses its deep concern regarding the expulsion of hundreds of Tamils from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, on June 7, 2007 by Sri Lankan army and police forces.

The expulsions followed a statement made on June 1 by the National Inspector-General of Police (IGP), saying that Tamils could not stay in the capital unless they presented « valid » justification for their residence in Colombo. The statement and the subsequent expulsion constitute a clear violation of both national and international law. The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has put a temporary halt to further expulsions by the security services pending a review of the case on June 22.

According to a statement by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense, 376 Tamils were forced out of Colombo on June 7 and transported by bus to several locations (Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Trincomalee) in the north inhabited by Tamil-majority populations. The northern districts constitute a front in the armed conflict raging between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the central government.

Following the IGP's announcement, those Tamils were removed from Colombo on the grounds that they lacked the necessary justification for their presence. Thus far, since no criteria have been made publicly available for what constitutes « validity », the expulsions appear to be arbitrary. Furthermore, witnesses reportedly confirm that the expulsions from the capital took place under extreme pressure: those targeted by the authorities were given very little time to collect or store their belongings and were not informed as to where they were being transferred. Some persons who were reportedly sick or otherwise not fit to travel were also included in the expulsions.

FIDH reminds that the forced removal of people based on ethnicity constitutes a clear violation of the prohibition of discrimination, even in time of public emergency under Article 4.1 the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Sri Lanka. In addition, everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence, as guaranteed in Art 12.1 of the ICCPR. The above-mentioned practices might also amount to collective punishment,

prohibited under Article 33 of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 under which : "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed".

FIDH recalls that LTTE has been involved in various attacks on civilians, including recent bomb attacks. FIDH condemns such attacks; however, an indiscriminate and arbitrary reply targeting the whole Tamil community can only further fuel violence and polarization between the different ethnic communities in Sri Lanka.

* Press Contact : Gaël Grilhot : +33 1 43 55 90 19

Isabelle Brachet

Desk Officer for Asia

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

17, passage de la Main d'Or

75011 Paris - France

tel : + 33 1 43 55 25 18 / fax : + 33 1 43 55 18 80

www.fidh.org