

*LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora, and the Canadian
Government Response*

**Jo Becker
Human Rights Watch**

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This paper is drawn from "Funding the Final War: LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora," a Human Rights Watch report, vol. 18, no. 1 (C), March 2006, as well as subsequent research conducted by the author.

Introduction

Sri Lankan Tamils make up one of Canada's largest migrant and refugee communities. Beginning in 1983, a brutal civil war in Sri Lanka prompted hundreds of thousands of minority Tamils to flee the country. By 2001, approximately one in four Sri Lankan Tamils resided outside of Sri Lanka, creating a global diaspora numbering between 600,000 to 800,000. Approximately one-third of that number settled in Canada. Other large Tamil communities are found in India, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, France and Australia.

Between 1996 and 2001, Canada's Sri Lankan Tamil community grew by 38 percent, making it the country's fastest growing ethnic population.¹ The vast majority of Canadian Tamils live in the Toronto area, creating a larger urban Tamil population than is found in any city in Sri Lanka itself.

Many Tamils have found safe and welcome haven in Canada from the gross human rights abuses committed by the Sri Lankan government against Sri Lanka's Tamil minority. However, some Tamils have found that the war has followed them to Canada and manifested itself in a different form of abuse in their new home – intimidation, harassment and extortion by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers), as this rebel force seeks support for its on-going war against the Sri Lankan government.

This paper will discuss the findings of an investigation that Human Rights Watch conducted in 2005 and 2006 into the use of intimidation and extortion by the Tamil Tigers against members of the Tamil diaspora in Canada and the United Kingdom, the response by the Canadian government, and future policy implications.²

¹ Wolfram Zunzer, "Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation," Berghof Occasional paper No. 26, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, September 2004.

² Our initial research was conducted through in-depth interviews conducted between October 2005 and February 2006 with members of the Tamil diaspora in the greater Toronto metropolitan area. Those interviewed included Tamil business owners, professionals, activists, journalists, and other individuals. Because of the sensitive nature of the issue and fears of reprisals for speaking out about their experiences, interview subjects were promised anonymity. Additional interviews were conducted in London, UK during

The LTTE and the Tamil Diaspora

Nearly a quarter century of Tamil grievances preceded the war in Sri Lanka. A government dominated by the Sinhalese majority took power in 1956, eight years after independence, and began to assert Sinhalese dominance. This led to systematic discrimination and the economic, political and cultural marginalization of the minority Tamil population. Peaceful efforts by Tamil political parties to redress Tamil grievances failed, and by the late 1970s, Tamil political parties and militant groups began to advocate for an independent Tamil state, "Tamil Eelam."

In 1983, the insurgency campaign erupted into war, following riots in Sri Lanka's capital that killed thousands of Tamils, destroyed an estimated 90 percent of Tamil-owned shops and businesses, and displaced nearly 100,000 Tamils.

During the war, Sri Lankan government forces carried out massacres of Tamil civilians and engaged in indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardment of civilian areas, including medical facilities and places of worship. Tens of thousands of Tamils "disappeared" while in the custody of Sri Lankan security forces, and suspected sympathizers of opposition groups were subject to mass arrests, extrajudicial executions, and prolonged detention without trial. Thousands of Tamils were displaced from their homes, and Tamil civilians often experienced beatings, torture and rape by Sri Lankan security personnel. To date, the war has resulted in more than 60,000 deaths. The majority are Tamil, even though Tamils make up only 18% of Sri Lanka's population.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) eventually emerged as the dominant Tamil armed opposition group, solidifying its authority by assassinating leaders of rival Tamil organizations. The Tamil Tigers committed other gross human rights abuses, including massacres, retaliatory killings, torture, executions, the use of suicide bombings, and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In the face of continuing government abuses, however, many Tamils perceived the Tamil Tigers as the best representative of the Tamil people and their interests, and supported strongly the Tamil Tigers' military efforts to achieve an independent Tamil state.

the same period. See Human Rights Watch, "Funding the "Final War": LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in

Support for the Tamil Tigers is particularly strong among many members of the Tamil diaspora who retain vivid memories of government abuses from the most severe periods of the war. By most accounts, the majority of Canadian Tamils support the Tamil Tigers and its objectives.

Suppressing Dissent: LTTE Tactics to Silence Critics of the Tamil Tigers

As the Canadian Tamil diaspora has grown, the LTTE has sought influence over many Tamil institutions—including Hindu temples, community organizations, and the Tamil media—in order to promote its agenda and exert control within the Tamil community. The result is a public discourse that is generally sympathetic to the LTTE. Organizations and individuals that criticize the Tamil Tigers may be marginalized, ostracized, or worse. Individuals who have criticized the Tamil Tigers or are perceived to be anti-LTTE have been subject to death threats, smear campaigns, and in rare cases, physical violence.

A history of LTTE violence in both Sri Lanka and the West has contributed to a climate of fear for many in the Tamil diaspora, discouraging statements, activities, or even social interactions that may be perceived as critical of the Tamil Tigers. The LTTE has killed hundreds of Tamils in Sri Lanka for apparently political reasons, including teachers, journalists, individuals linked with opposition parties, and others apparently killed solely for working in educational, social or religious programs funded by the Sri Lankan government. For many Tamils in the West with family members remaining in Sri Lanka, the message was that any act of disloyalty could result in death.

In the West, incidents of physical violence against critics of the Tamil Tigers are rare. The best known case in Canada took place in 1993, when a prominent Toronto journalist, DBS Jeyaraj, was attacked by four assailants with baseball bats who broke both of his legs. In the mid-1990's, Jeyaraj published an independent Tamil weekly that reported on a series of LTTE military defeats, while other papers portrayed LTTE operations in a more favorable light. As result of his coverage, Jeyaraj began receiving systematic, threatening phone calls on a daily basis. In November 1995, he received thirty-seven abusive calls in a single day. When he continued to publish critical

accounts of the LTTE, pro-LTTE operatives began to target his advertisers and Tamil shops that carried his paper. He was forced to stop publishing the paper in 1995.³

Even though the attack against Jeyaraj took place over a decade ago, it is still often cited in the Tamil community as an example of what can happen to those who publicly criticize the LTTE, and many believe that it continues to have a chilling effect on discourse within the diaspora.

The LTTE often use family members – both in the West and in Sri Lanka – to warn Tamils who are perceived as too vocal. One Toronto human rights activist received a telephone call from a relative who had been contacted by an LTTE representative, and warned, “If you are not going to control yourself, they will take care of you.”⁴ A Tamil in the UK who criticized the LTTE on a call-in radio show reported that his brother in Sri Lanka was subsequently summoned to a meeting with the LTTE and told that his brother in the West should “shut up” or it “would not be good for him.”⁵

Some anti-LTTE critics have been subjected to smear campaigns on LTTE-linked websites. In October 2005, a Tamil community leader was arrested after an LTTE supporter falsely accused him of assault. Police quickly dismissed the charges when it became clear that the accusations were without foundation, but pro-LTTE newspapers published details of the arrest, in what the leader believed was a deliberate attempt to intimidate him and damage his reputation.⁶

During our investigation, numerous members of the Tamil community spoke of their fear of speaking out publicly regarding human rights issues or making any comments critical of the Tamil Tigers. One Toronto man told Human Rights Watch, “Canada is not actually a democracy because we can’t even open our mouths against the LTTE. People are scared to open their mouths.”⁷

The Diaspora as a Source of Financial Support for the Tamil Tigers

³ For excerpts of the “Open Letter” published by DBS Jeyaraj regarding his decision to suspend publication of Muncharie, see “The Death of a Newspaper,” Sunday Times (Sri Lanka), April 7, 1996, reproduced online at www.sinhaya.com/newspaper_death.html.

⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Toronto, November 2005.

⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview, London, UK, January 2006.

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Toronto, November 2005

As the Tamil diaspora grew and established itself in Canada and elsewhere, it provided a steady stream of income for the Tamil Tigers. There are no reliable mechanisms to track the exact amount of money the Tamil Tigers received from the Tamil diaspora, but by the mid-1990's, some experts believed that 80 to 90 percent of the Tamil Tigers' military budget came from overseas sources, including contributions from the diaspora, and income from international investments and businesses.⁸ According to an August 2007 report from Jane's Intelligence Review, the Tamil Tigers currently generate an estimated US\$200 to 300 million per year in revenue from its various fronts, and licit and illicit businesses, including narcotics trafficking and credit card fraud.⁹

Within the diaspora, funds were raised through a variety of means, including collections at Hindu temples and public events celebrating LTTE "martyrs," and systematic door-to-door collections by teams of volunteers. Tamils established a range of charitable organizations to raise funds for Tamil causes, including the World Tamil Movement and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, among others. While many charities solicited funds to assist civilians affected by the war, investigations by Canadian intelligence and other sources found that some organizations funneled a significant amount of money to the Tamil Tigers for its military operations. In 2000, the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) concluded that at least eight non-profit organizations and five companies were operating in Canada as fronts for the LTTE.¹⁰

The Tamil Tigers established computer databases to keep track of individuals who contributed, including their addresses and telephone numbers. It also utilized public records and information from supporters to keep track of Tamils in the community, including changes of address and new arrivals. Many Tamil households and businesses, if not the majority, received regular visits from representatives of front organizations for the Tamil Tigers, seeking contributions. To establish regular streams of income, front organizations for the Tamil Tigers sought pledges of monthly contributions from Tamil families, and by the early 2000s, fundraisers in Toronto were asking Tamils to sign forms authorizing automatic monthly electronic transfers from their bank accounts.

⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Toronto, November 2005.

⁸ Peter Chalk, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) International Organization and Operations – A Preliminary Analysis," Commentary No. 77, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, March 17, 2000.

⁹ Jane's Intelligence Review, "Feeding the Tiger – How Sri Lankan insurgents fund their war," August 1, 2007.

¹⁰ Confidential CSIS documents obtained by Human Rights Watch.

Many, if not most, of Canadian Tamils have willingly contributed funds to support the Tamil Tigers. However, other members of the Tamil community do not want to contribute, either because of their personal economic circumstances, or because they do not believe in the Tamil Tigers' goals or methods.

Extortion, coercion, and the "Final War"

In 2005, a four-year ceasefire between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government began to crumble, with escalating attacks by both parties. Coinciding with this impending return to war was a massive fundraising drive by the Tamil Tigers among the Tamil diaspora. Not only in Canada, but in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, representatives of the Tamil Tigers and their front organizations systematically approached Tamil families and businesses, requesting substantial sums of money. These requests were often accompanied by intimidation, coercion and outright threats.

In Toronto, individual families typically were asked to pay between Cdn\$2500 and \$5000, although some families were reportedly asked for as much as \$10,000. Business owners were asked for amounts ranging from Cdn \$25,000 to \$100,000. One Hindu temple reported being asked for \$1 million. Individuals and businesses were sometimes told that the money was a "loan" that would be repaid with interest. Others were asked for an outright contribution.

The purpose for the contribution was usually made very clear. In many of the cases investigated, funds were requested for the "final war." Families and business owners were told that the Tamil Tigers had a plan to drive Sri Lankan army forces out of the North and East of Sri Lanka within two months and needed financing from the West. Others were told that the Tamil Tigers were preparing to declare "Tamil Eelam" (i.e. independence) and needed to build its treasury, or to gain UN recognition.

The individuals making the requests typically identified themselves directly as representatives of the Tamil Tigers, the World Tamil Movement (an LTTE front organization), or would simply state

that they had been “sent by Prabahkaran” (the leader of the LTTE). These representatives would often make their visits in pairs, or at times, in groups of up to three or four persons.

LTTE representatives used several tactics to obtain contributions. They visited families and businesses repeatedly, stating that they would continue to return until a contribution was made. One family received three visits in one week, while a medical professional reported three visits over a ten-day period. If allowed into a home, representatives often made lengthy visits, continuing to press their case until they received a pledge. When Tamil families stated that they did not have the funds that were being requested, LTTE representatives sometimes instructed them to borrow the money, charge the contribution to their credit card, or even to take out a second mortgage to finance their pledge.

In some cases, LTTE representatives threatened Tamils that they would not be able to return to Tamil Tiger-held areas in Sri Lanka to visit family members unless they contributed the amount requested or that they would encounter unspecified “trouble.” In a few cases, LTTE representatives made threats (both explicit and implicit) against Tamils or their families in Canada, or engaged in intimidating behavior. For example, one business owner who refused to give money was told “you obviously don’t care about your wife and children” and another was told “we will deal with you.” The second individual told Human Rights Watch that when said in Tamil (*“Nee kavanamai iru. Unnai Kavanippom. Nee poorathai parpom.”*), this phrase suggests that the person may be killed.

By December 2005, the fundraising drive had affected a large proportion of Toronto’s Tamil population. One Tamil whose job brought him in contact with large numbers of Tamils reported that he knew of at least 70 or 80 people who had been asked for money (often between \$2000 and \$3000), and that the majority had given. One Toronto woman reported that every Tamil family in her neighborhood had been approached for funds.

Many believed that the Tamil Tigers systematically tracked the whereabouts of Tamil individuals, businesses, and families. Some Tamils reported that within a week or two of moving into a new home, Tamil Tiger representatives would appear at the new address to make contact. Some

members of the community also believed that the amount of money the Tamil Tigers requested was based on LTTE intelligence regarding the assets of the family or business. The RCMP raid on the World Tamil Movement offices in Toronto in April 2006 indicated that this belief was well-founded, as the RCMP retrieved files of Election Canada voter lists with Tamil names highlighted, and detailed personal information and contribution histories.

Extortion of Canadian Tamils Visiting Sri Lanka

Many members of the Tamil diaspora have family members remaining in Sri Lanka, and during the four years of relative ceasefire between 2002 and 2006, took advantage of the relative calm to return for visits. Some also retain property in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Tigers used these connections as another avenue to extract funds from Western Tamils. In 2005, Canadian Tamils began reporting that upon returning to Sri Lanka and entering the northeast of Sri Lanka (the area where most of the Tamil population resides and the Tamil Tigers' activities are concentrated), they were ordered by LTTE representatives to report to an LTTE office within a three-day period. When they did so, they were required to give detailed personal information, including their home address and phone number, employer, salary information, whether they owned their own home, and information regarding their past contributions to the LTTE. They were then assessed a "tax," often based on \$1 per day for each day they had lived in the West, particularly if they could not document their contributions to the LTTE from the West. For individuals who had lived in the West for long periods of time, the amount assessed was often substantial. For example, a Tamil who had lived in Toronto for 20 years might be expected to pay Cdn\$7,300. Alternatively, some were pressured to sign a pledge to pay a monthly amount once they returned home. In two cases known to Human Rights Watch, the LTTE confiscated the passports of visiting Tamils in order to create additional pressure to provide the requested sums.

As this practice became known, many Canadian Tamil families reportedly began to change their travel plans and even cancel trips for fear of being forced to pay sums that they were not willing or able to give.

Pressures to contribute

There are myriad pressures on members of the Tamil community to accede to the Tamil Tigers' demands for funds. As described above, many individuals fear that failure to give will mean that they will never be allowed to return to Sri Lanka to visit family members, or will be required to give even larger sums of money when they do. Others fear that their family members in Sri Lanka may suffer reprisals if they fail to contribute. Politically motivated killings of Tamils by the LTTE are routine in Sri Lanka, and during the period just preceding our research, took place at a rate of one per day.¹¹ In other cases, Tamils in Sri Lanka who are known to have relatives in the West have been abducted and held for ransom. For these reasons, LTTE representatives in Canada rarely need to make overt threats in order to gain compliance. One Toronto woman told Human Rights Watch, "I have a brother in Sri Lanka. I will do whatever they ask."¹²

During its on-going investigation into LTTE financing in Canada, the RCMP obtained a letter containing death threats that circulated in the Montreal Tamil community in September 2003. The letter was signed by the "Patriot Army of Eelam" and accused individuals of being traitors because they did not support the World Tamil Movement.¹³

Pressure is particularly intense for members of the Tamil business and professional community. Many rely on the Tamil community for a significant portion of their business, and fear that if they are labeled anti-LTTE, they will lose customers or clients, and subsequently, their livelihood. At a very practical level, some people agree to give simply because they do not want the hassle of being repeatedly called and visited.

Tamil Perceptions of the Canadian authorities

In 2005 and early 2006, none of the Canadian Tamils who spoke to Human Rights Watch about being pressed for money had reported the incident to the police or other government authorities. Many shared a belief that reporting LTTE pressure tactics to the police would put them at additional risk, by arousing questions from other Tamils in the community if the police were seen visiting their

¹¹ See Human Rights Watch, "Political Killings Escalate," press release, August 15, 2005.

¹² Human Rights Watch interview, Toronto, January 2006.

¹³ National Post, "Tigers use pressure to raise funds, police say," May 10, 2007.

home, and possibly being identified as an informant. Some feared that if it became known that they had made a police complaint, they risked ostracism from other members of the Tamil community. In addition, many expressed little confidence that the police were knowledgeable enough about LTTE activities and the dynamics of the Tamil community to respond effectively.

One businessman who was pressured to give Cdn\$20,000 said that he had considered going to the police, but decided not to, because he had little confidence that the police would arrest the individuals involved, and was afraid that making a report would bring retaliation from the LTTE.

Canadian Tamils interviewed during the investigation repeatedly expressed frustration that the Tamil Tigers' activities in the Tamil community were perceived by Canadian authorities as a "Tamil" problem, but not a "Canadian" problem. Many believed that even in the absence of formal complaints, the police were well-aware of the activity, but did not treat it as a priority.

In the larger Toronto area, the Tamil community forms a powerful voting bloc, and some Tamils expressed a view that because some members of Parliament from ridings in the Toronto area depended on Tamil votes, that these MPs were reluctant to speak out publicly regarding the Tamil Tigers' activities.

Policy recommendations:

The intimidation, coercion and extortion documented by our investigation indicated a need for a much stronger, more proactive response by Canadian authorities to protect members of the Tamil community from illegal activities. Immediate priorities were more effective law enforcement to curtail extortion and intimidation, improving outreach to the Tamil community regarding relevant law and avenues of recourse, and building trust and understanding between the Tamil community and law enforcement authorities.

Specifically, our report recommended that law enforcement, led by the police and including other agencies as appropriate, conduct active investigations of intimidation and extortion in the Tamil community, and initiate arrests and prosecutions as warranted. To facilitate such investigations, we

recommended the establishment of a special hotline, staffed by Tamil speakers, to receive complaints and provide information to law enforcement authorities. In parallel with these efforts, we recommended that the Canadian government conduct a public education campaign in the Tamil community, using Tamil newspapers, radio and other media to publicize relevant law related to intimidation, harassment and fundraising by the LTTE or other groups, and steps that individuals could take if they were subject to such activity.

We also recommended meetings with leaders in the Tamil community to discuss patterns of LTTE-related intimidation and extortion, using such meetings to communicate the government's deep concern regarding such activity, its commitment to respond, and steps that are being taken to protect members of the Tamil community.

The Terrorism Debate and the Response of the Canadian Government

While in power, the Liberal government received significant pressure to add the Tamil Tigers to the list of proscribed terrorist entities in Canada, but did not do so. The Conservatives sharply criticized the Liberals for not adding the LTTE to the terrorist list, and during its 2005 election campaign, promised to do so. The Conservatives came to power in January 2006, but did not immediately act on its pledge. In the early months of 2006, the question of whether or not the LTTE should be listed in Canada was the subject of on-going public debate.

Human Rights Watch does not take a position on listing specific entities as "terrorist" and made no recommendations in this regard in its report. Our research, in fact, found that there was little difference in the LTTE's use of intimidation and extortion in the UK and Canada, despite the fact that the UK had banned the LTTE as a terrorist group (in 2001) and Canada had not. In the absence of an effective law enforcement response, extortion continued in both countries.

In March 2006, the issue of LTTE intimidation and extortion received major media attention following the release of Human Rights Watch's report. The *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette* all published editorials calling on the Conservative

government to list the LTTE as a terrorist entity. The government did so on April 8, 2006, making it illegal for individuals to provide financial support for the LTTE.

The decision was highly controversial, and many Tamil groups, particularly those allied with the LTTE, condemned the move. Some believed it would unfairly stigmatize the entire Tamil community, and put even law-abiding Tamils under suspicion.

Days after the government's listing of the LTTE, the RCMP conducted raids on the World Tamil Movement offices in Toronto and Montreal as part of a long-running investigation into LTTE financing that had begun in 2002. The RCMP seized 1,029 items, including comprehensive lists of Tamils living in Canada, contribution records, and cancelled checks. The investigation is on-going. Reportedly 63 suspects are under investigation, but to date, no charges have been made.

Developments since 2006:

In October 2006, Human Rights Watch conducted follow-up interviews with community workers, businesspeople, professionals and activists in the greater Toronto Tamil community to assess the status of LTTE activities, and the impact of government initiatives to date. We made several findings:

1) LTTE fundraising: Members of the Tamil community reported that LTTE fundraising had become much less visible and less aggressive, compared to a year earlier. We found that demands for specific sums of money and intimidating behavior were relatively rare, and received no new reports regarding the use of threats. Most attributed the change to the government's listing of the LTTE as a terrorist group, the RCMP investigation of the World Tamil Movement, and public exposure of the LTTE's tactics. Tamil sources also reported Tamils were more easily and confidently able to refuse LTTE requests for money on the grounds that funding the group had become illegal. The Toronto Police also reported that public attention had resulted in an increase in

reports to the police from Tamils wishing to provide information about incidents of intimidation and extortion.¹⁴

However, sources also affirmed that although it was less noticeable, LTTE fundraising continued and Tamil families continued to be approached for funds. Additional interviews conducted in September 2007 similarly found that requests for funds continued, and that some individuals were being asked for up to \$5000.

2) Police investigations and prosecutions: The RCMP's investigation of the World Tamil Movement, including the April 2006 raids on WTM offices in Toronto and Montreal, certainly helped to curtail illegal LTTE activities. However, some Tamils expressed frustration that there had been no arrests or prosecutions resulting from the investigation, including of the "street-level" fundraisers that routinely collect for the LTTE. Many of these individuals are well-known in the community and easily identified.

The absence of arrests or prosecutions of "street-level" fundraisers has had at least two negative consequences in the community. First, it has reinforced a lack of confidence that many Canadian Tamils have in the police and its ability and commitment to protect members of the community. Secondly, it raises the concern that over time, if LTTE operatives perceive no credible risk of prosecution, they will resume more aggressive tactics of intimidation and extortion. In the UK, for example, members of the Tamil community reported that immediately after the UK government proscribed the LTTE in 2001 as a terrorist entity, illegal activities by the LTTE dropped significantly. However, over time, in the absence of active law enforcement, acts of intimidation and extortion resumed. By the time of our investigation in 2005, we found that such activities were just as prevalent (if not more so) in the UK than in Canada, despite the UK's ban on LTTE activities.

3) Engagement with the Tamil Community: The Canadian government and the police have made some efforts to reach out to the Tamil community, but these initiatives have been insufficient. Following the listing of the LTTE, the government placed several advertisements in the Toronto

¹⁴ Telephone communication with Detective Inspector Steve Irwin, Intelligence Services, Toronto Police, March 22, 2006.

Star¹⁵ and Tamil newspapers regarding the meaning of the listing, and providing information on how Tamils could contact authorities if they were subject to illegal activities. Human Rights Watch heard appreciation from a number of Tamils regarding these ads, particularly those that appeared in the Tamil press. Such outreach to the Tamil community is very important, particularly through the Tamil media, which is often heavily influenced by the LTTE and does not typically include perspectives that are critical of the LTTE. However, in a letter to Minister of Public Security Stockwell Day in December 2006,¹⁶ we recommended that such advertisements be placed on an ongoing basis, and should be placed not only in the Tamil print media, but the Tamil broadcast media as well.

Human Rights Watch met on two occasions, in March 2006 and in October 2006, with officials in the Department of Public Safety to discuss the government's response to LTTE activity. In both instances, officials spoke about the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security as a major initiative by the department that could respond to issues in the Tamil community. However, at the time of our meetings, none of the roundtables had been held in Toronto, where the vast majority of Canadian Tamils live.

In March 2007, the Toronto Police and the RCMP held a meeting with a small number of invited representatives from Tamil community organizations not aligned with the LTTE to discuss concerns in the Tamil community, including the activities of the LTTE. The meeting was intended to be one of a series of meetings to foster stronger relationships with the Tamil community. However, despite positive feedback from some of those who attended, no further meetings appear to have been held.¹⁷

4) Negative consequences from the LTTE listing: Many Tamils feared that the government's proscription of the LTTE would exacerbate anti-Tamil racism in Canada or contribute to other negative repercussions for the Tamil community. During interviews in October 2006, we received several accounts of employment-based discrimination or harassment following the listing, including

¹⁵ For example, "Making our Communities Safer," advertisement by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, Toronto Star, June 19, 2006.

¹⁶ See <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/06/canada14771.htm>

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interviews with forum participants, September 2007.

cases of employers making remarks in front of Tamil employees about Tamils being terrorist, and one case where an employee was demoted and ultimately dismissed, ostensibly because his employer felt he could not “trust” a Tamil.

Some Tamils expressed concern that the government had not done enough to make clear distinctions between the LTTE and the Tamil community as a whole, and to speak out against possible anti-Tamil bias that may result from the LTTE ban. Human Rights Watch raised this concern in letters and meetings with the Department of Public Safety in late 2006, and recommended that senior government officials seek opportunities to make statements in support of the Tamil community.

Conclusion:

The LTTE’s use of intimidation, harassment, extortion and even physical violence against members of the Tamil community has effectively stifled Tamil dissent regarding human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. Extortion has forced Tamils, including those who do not support the LTTE, to provide financial support for LTTE operations, including its continued pattern of child recruitment and political killings. Both intimidation and extortion have significantly limited the ability of Canadian Tamils to effectively speak out against LTTE abuses and influence LTTE behavior.

Although the LTTE’s illegal activities in Canada have declined substantially since early 2006, recent events in Sri Lanka raise serious concerns as to whether this progress will be maintained. The dynamics within Canada’s Sri Lankan Tamil community are inextricably linked to events in Sri Lanka itself. Since the Sri Lankan government and LTTE returned to full-scale conflict in mid-2006, conditions for Sri Lanka’s Tamils have deteriorated considerably. Since August 2006, over 315,000 Sri Lankans, primarily Tamil, have been internally displaced by the conflict. Abuses by government forces have increased significantly, marked by disappearances, attacks against civilians, and unlawful killings.¹⁸ These events create increasing pressure on Canadian Tamils to support the LTTE and demonstrate their loyalty to the Tamil “cause,” and make it more difficult to refuse fundraisers’ requests. At the same time, the LTTE requires a continued stream of revenue to

maintain its continued military operations as hostilities increase. This combination of factors may erode the recent positive trends seen in Canada and prompt the LTTE to return to intimidation tactics and extortion against Canadian Tamils.

The Canadian government is obliged to protect its residents and citizens from intimidation, harassment and extortion, and to ensure the right of Canadian Tamils to free expression regarding issues of critical concern to the Tamil community. As described in this paper, this requires a range of initiatives on the part of government, including more effective outreach to the Tamil community, active and visible law enforcement, effective training programs for the police, effective responses to anti-Tamil discrimination, and clear statements by senior government officials that support the law-abiding Tamil majority in Canada, while condemning the abusive tactics of a few.

¹⁸ See Human Rights Watch, "Return to War: Human Rights Under Siege," vol.19, No. 11(c), August 2007, [online] <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/srilanka0807/>.