

A Torrent of Tamils Fuels Fear. (1986, September 28). *The Province*.

A TORRENT OF TAMILS FUELS FEAR

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Staff Reporters

A torrent of Tamil refugees is flooding into Vancouver.

And they've run into a storm of controversy over whether they're really political refugees or simply immigration cheats, criminals and even terrorists.

More than 83 Tamils have landed in Vancouver this month, many with falsified travel documents or none at all.

Sri Lankan government official Sam Wijesinha said most are using the pretext of persecution to enjoy a life of luxury in Canada. "Your leniency will create a flood. They'll say anything to get into Canada."

Vancouver immigration lawyer Gerald Goldstein blasts Ottawa for going soft on Tamils who arrive here without proper passports. "I think it makes an absolute mockery of our system. It sets a bad precedent."

Goldstein said Tamil refugees who arrive without ID may have criminal records, or may even be guerrillas. "It would be possible, but very difficult for Immigration to tell. I think it'll reflect negatively on people who want to come from other countries."

Officials say 18 Tamils arrived last weekend on a Cathay Pacific flight from the Orient. Most had



FREDERICK SEEVARATNAM
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torn up their documents before landing at Vancouver airport.

All have been granted refugee status — a one-year permit to live and work here while their cases are reviewed — because they come

from war-torn Sri Lanka, an island nation off the southern tip of India.

Since 1983, there's been civil war between the minority Tamils who are Hindus and want an independent state, and the majority Sinhalese, Buddhists who control the government.

But Vancouver immigration lawyer Phil Rankin says Tamils are as desperate as the Jews of Nazi Germany. "They're using the loopholes in the system to survive. They're no different than Jews getting out of Germany."

Vancouver Legal Aid lawyer Rod Holloway says Tamils who can afford it travel by boat to India to buy illegal passports, rather than risk the dangerous journey from Jaffna, in the north, to the Canadian embassy in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital. "Each wave of immigrants has some bad ones, but that's the chance you take in order to fulfil the humanitarian commitment."

Charles Groos, another Legal Aid lawyer, said the 155 Tamils who lied to gain entry into Canada in August after arriving by boat in Newfoundland have tarnished the reputation of legitimate Tamil refugees.

Frederick Seevaratnam, a leader in Vancouver's small Tamil community, agrees: "The way they talked, it's undermined our image."