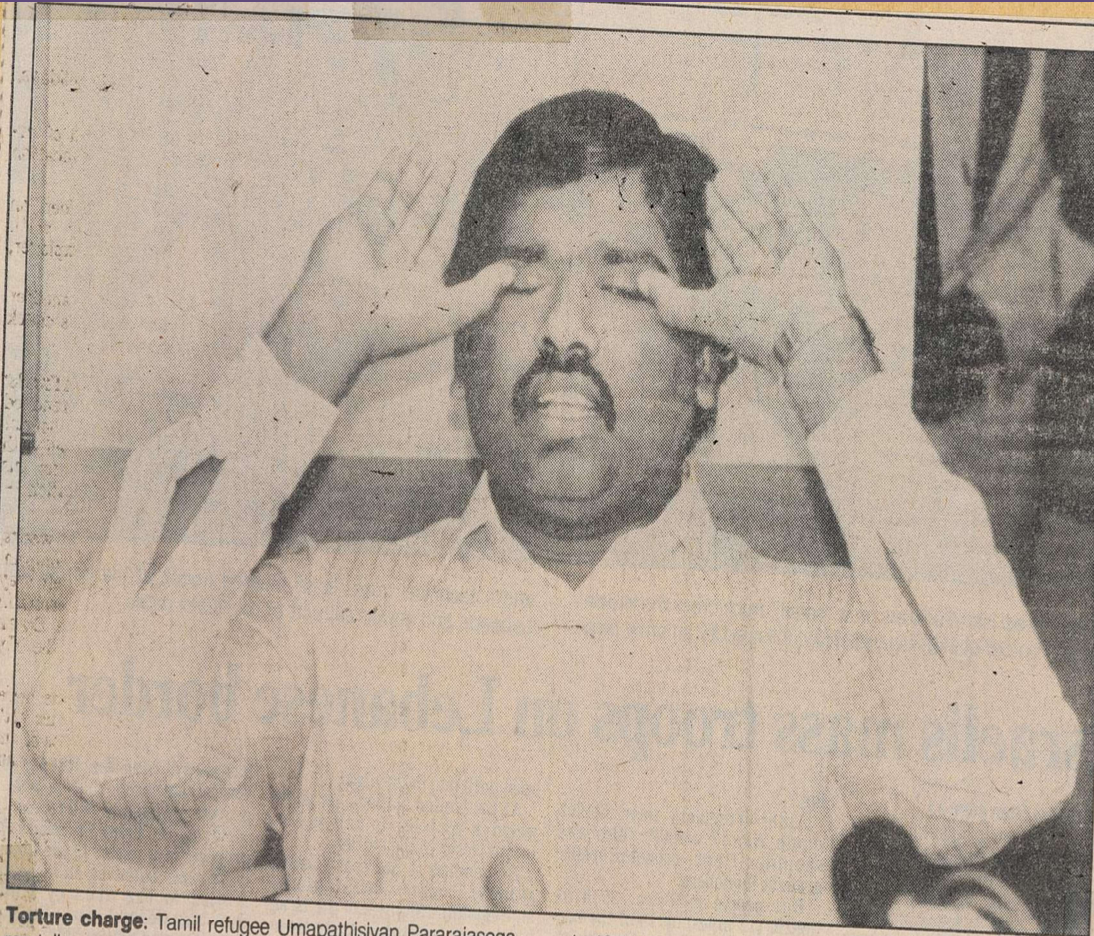


Diplomat denies torturing Tamil. (1986, September 23). *The Toronto Star*.



**Torture charge:** Tamil refugee Umapathisivan Pararajasegaran tells reporters in Ottawa the Sri Lankan high commissioner to Canada tortured him when he was in detention in Sri Lanka

in 1979. The high commissioner, Tissa Weeratunga, denies the charge, while the Tamils of Canada Association asks that he face charges of human rights abuses.

PHOTO FEATURES

## Diplomat denies torturing Tamil

OTTAWA (CP) — The Sri Lankan high commissioner to Canada has denied a charge yesterday by a Tamil refugee living in Paris and currently in Ottawa that the high commissioner tortured him while he was in detention in 1979.

The high commissioner, retired army Brig.-Gen. Tissa Weeratunga, denied the charge in an interview with *The Canadian Press*. And the ombudsman for the Sri Lankan government, Sam Wijesinha, said he has never received a human rights complaint in five years in the post.

As debate heated over the former military role of the high commissioner, the Tamils of Canada association challenged Weeratunga to face charges of human rights abuses in a Canadian court. They said he should drop his diplomatic immunity and let the courts decide on his guilt or innocence.

At the same time, the Sri Lankan high commission released an unsigned statement accusing the Tamil refugee, Umapathisivan (Baby) Pararajasegaran, of being a terrorist and thief who is part

### Refugee terrorist and thief Sri Lankan officials say

of "a separatist network" trying to destabilize the Sri Lankan government.

But during a crowded news conference at a downtown hotel, Pararajasegaran denied he was a terrorist or that he had committed any crimes in Sri Lanka.

#### Pointing to scars

"I am not aware of any instance in Sri Lanka in which I was wanted," he said through an interpreter, adding "Up to now in my life, I have never been involved in any crimes."

Pointing to his scars and recalling his torture in detention in the city of Jaffna in 1979, he repeated his accusations that Weeratunga personally directed the beatings and that Weeratunga threatened him with death if he didn't cooperate with interrogators.

At that time Weeratunga was the army commander in Jaffna,

ordered to put down a wave of unrest and bombings that had erupted in the Tamil areas of northern Sri Lanka.

Denying that he was personally involved in any abuse of human rights, the diplomat said Pararajasegaran's charges "are absolute nonsense."

"I never took part in any torturing at all. . . . All this is a part of the campaign of the separatist movement that is on in Sri Lanka. It is an attempt to smear me and through me, Sri Lanka."

The high commissioner admitted that there were excesses during the six months he was in command in Jaffna, but he said corrective action was taken, including courts martial and jailings of suspected human rights abusers in the armed forces.

He called the allegations "stupid; they are ridiculous . . .

Never have I personally tortured any human."

Allegations of the kind made by Pararajasegaran and others collected by the human rights group Amnesty International have prompted the Tamils of Canada association to demand that Weeratunga be sent back to Sri Lanka.

In a statement, the association challenged Weeratunga to drop his diplomatic immunity and face the allegations in court.

#### Private hearings

The Tamil association also called on the Commons committee on human rights to investigate the allegations by conducting private hearings at which other Tamil refugees can tell their stories.

Rev. Philip Ratnapala, spokesman for the Tamils, said private hearings are needed to allow refugees who have endured torture or who fear for the safety of family members in Sri Lanka to testify to the allegations of torture, murder and disappearances by the Sri Lankan security forces.