

Tamil refugee trades accusations with Sri Lankan envoy to Canada.
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During Ottawa news conference, Tamil spokesman Philip Ratnapala points to head injury Umaphathisivan Pararajegaran received during alleged torture session.

Tamil refugee trades accusations with Sri Lankan envoy to Canada

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A Tamil refugee now living in Paris surfaced in Ottawa yesterday to accuse the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Canada of torturing him while he was in detention in 1979.

But the high commissioner, retired army brigadier Tissa Weeratunga, denied the charges in an interview. 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 grew more heated over the former military role of the high commissioner, the Tamils of Canada association challenged Mr. 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, Umaphathisivan

(Baby) Pararajegaran, of being a terrorist and thief who is part of "a separatist network" trying to destabilize the Sri Lankan Government.

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

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

Pointing to his scars and describing torture in detention in the city of Jaffna in 1979, he repeated his accusations that Mr. Weeratunga personally directed the beatings and threatened him with death if he did not co-operate with interrogators.

At that time, Mr. 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 Mr. Pararajegaran'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."

The high commissioner acknowledged 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.

Sitting in the posh surroundings of his official Ottawa residence, the envoy said the allegations are "stupid, they are ridiculous.... Never have I personally tortured any human."

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