

4 Sri Lankans released from U.S. jail. (1989, February 03). *The globe and mail.*

4 Sri Lankans released from U.S. jail

BY CHARLOTTE MONTGOMERY
The Globe and Mail

Four Sri Lankans, released from jail in the United States yesterday an hour before their deportation hearings were to begin, have filed claims for refugee status in Canada.

The four men were released after they posted bond money which U.S. immigration authorities had agreed to reduce to \$7,500 (U.S.) each from \$10,000.

Lorne Waldman, a Toronto immigration lawyer for the men, said they went from jail in Buffalo to the Peace Bridge, where they were processed as refugee claimants by Canadian immigration officials late yesterday.

Arul Aruliah of the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada, who had appealed to federal Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall to intervene on behalf of the men, said that he was pleased with their release.

His organization did not have the money to post bond, he said, adding that the men can thank Buffalo refugee workers for gathering the money.

Benedict Ferro, Buffalo district director of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, said in an interview that if the men are allowed into Canada, "they will have departed the U.S. and our

case will be closed." That would mean that the bond money probably, would be returned rather than forfeited.

Mr. Ferro said he agreed to reduce the amount of the bonds yesterday after the men co-operated and provided information. He said he could not specify what information they had provided.

The plight of the four men has preoccupied several lawyers and refugee aid workers in Buffalo since they were jailed there on Jan. 25.

Karen Spencer, a lawyer who works on a voluntary basis with Catholic Charities in Buffalo, said she had been worried that the men would be beyond help and would be returned to Sri Lanka if bond money was not posted by this weekend.

Mr. Waldman said that, from the information he has been given about the men, he expects they have a good chance of being accepted as refugees.

Ms Spencer has said they told her of being tortured by the military in Sri Lanka.

"As a result of this incident, the Canadian government has to look seriously at the whole concept of direct-back," Mr. Waldman said in a reference to Canada's practice of directing refugee claimants arriving at Canada-U.S. border points back to the United States to wait until the hearing into their claim.

The Sri Lankans appeared to have been entangled in a behind-the-scenes dispute between U.S. and Canadian immigration officials that has been smoothed out, at least temporarily.

