

Canada won't intervene to help four Sri Lankans jailed in U.S..  
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## Canada won't intervene to help four Sri Lankans jailed in U.S.

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Canadian immigration authorities have no plans to intervene to help four Sri Lankans who had attempted to enter Canada as refugees and now face deportation from the United States.

Despite an appeal by Toronto lawyer Lorne Waldman that their situation be reviewed, the case of the four jailed men was not raised at a meeting yesterday between Canadian and U.S. immigration officials, said Judith Klein, spokesman for the Ontario region of the Canadian Immigration Department.

"We did not deal with specific cases," Ms Klein said. She added that there were no plans to ask the United States to allow the Sri Lankans out of jail so they could make formal applications for refugee status at the Canadian border, something they had been attempting to do a week ago when they were jailed by U.S. immigration officials.

Meanwhile, refugee aid groups are scrambling to raise \$40,000 (U.S.) by the end of the week, the amount of bond required to have the men released from jail in Buffalo.

Karen Spencer, a Buffalo lawyer for the men, said U.S. refugee aid workers are finding it difficult to raise such a large sum. She added that the men are "scared to death" of being sent back to Sri Lanka, where they say they were tortured by the military. Three of them have spent time in jail in Sri Lanka and all have been warned by relatives not to return, she said.

Deportation proceedings for the men are scheduled to begin in Buffalo tomorrow, Ms Spencer said they could apply for asylum in the United States, but their chances would be "pretty well nil" because few Sri Lankans are accepted.

Ms Klein said yesterday's meeting of immigration officials dealt only with general concerns about the handling of refugee claimants who are in the United States awaiting Canadian hearings.

However, she said officials from the two countries had agreed that, from now on, when it is considered necessary to jail refugee claimants who are in the United States awaiting Canadian hearings, Canada will be notified. Canadian officials will then allow them to enter this country to wait, Ms Klein said.

When they are jailed south of the border, such people become subject to U.S. deportation proceedings and may not be able to reach their Canadian hearing if they cannot post the required bond to get out of jail.

Before Canada's speedy new refugee system came into effect on Jan. 1, refugee claimants liable to be jailed in the United States were allowed into Canada pending a hearing to determine if they would be accepted as refugees. U.S. immigration officials have said that Canada stopped admitting these cases at the beginning of the year.

Canadian officials offer a somewhat different explanation, saying they had been given assurances in such cases that the claimants would be allowed out of jail to get to their hearings.

Mr. Waldman and Ms Spencer had hoped that the Sri Lankans might be assisted as a result of yesterday's meeting.

Mr. Waldman said in an interview that he had written a letter to Gene Harrigan, director-general of immigration for Ontario, asking that he intervene on behalf of the four men when he met Benedict Ferro, district director of U.S. immigration in Buffalo.

Mr. Waldman said that because the four men were turned back from the Canadian border last week and told to return when a Tamil interpreter was available, the Canadian government bears responsibility to ensure they can come back to file a claim. (The men have said they had jumped ship in Virginia after being ordered detained on board. When they arrived at the Canadian border, they did not file a claim for refugee status, but were told to return when an interpreter was ready.)

"I'm not optimistic," Mr. Waldman said of the chances that U.S. refugee groups and Tamil organizations will be able to raise bond money for the men. "I think there has to be high level (political) intervention. . . . They have to assume responsibility. They (the four men) were only turned back for administrative convenience."

Ms Spencer said she is concerned that if bond money is not raised by the weekend, the men may be transferred to another part of the United States where her organization will not be able to help. She said it took some negotiations with officials yesterday to keep the men from being sent to a Florida jail because Buffalo area facilities are crowded.