

Tamil claims diplomat directed 1979 torture

OTTAWA (CP) — A Tamil refugee living in Paris surfaced in Ottawa yesterday to accuse the Sri Lankan high commissioner to Canada of torturing him while he was detained in 1979.

But the high commissioner, retired army brigadier Tissa Weeratunga, denied the charges. 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.

The Tamils of Canada association challenged Weeratunga to face charges of human-rights abuses in a Canadian court.

At the same time, the Sri Lankan high commission made public an unsigned statement accusing the Tamil refugee, Umapathisivan (Baby) Pararajasegaran, of being a terrorist and thief who is part of "a separatist network" trying to destabilize the Sri Lankan government.

But at news conference at a downtown hotel, Pararajasegaran denied he was a terrorist.

"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 in-

involved in any crimes."

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

Weeratunga was then commanding the army in Jaffna, which had been ordered to put down a wave of unrest.

Denying he was personally involved in any abuse of human rights, Weeratunga said the 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."

Pararajasegaran's allegations and others collected by the human-rights group Amnesty International have led the Tamil association to demand Weeratunga be sent back to Sri Lanka.

They cite the case of Paul Nallanayagam, a Canadian citizen and missionary in Sri Lanka, who spent 121 days in detention on charges of slandering the state after he gave interviews about the disappearance of 23 young men arrested by security forces.