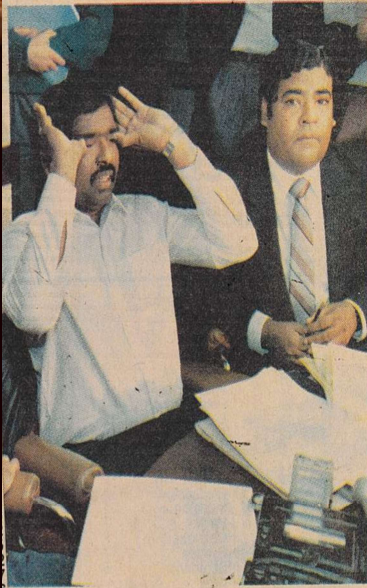


Tamil's story of torture fabricated to poison diplomatic ties, envoy says. (1986, September 23). *The Ottawa Citizen*.



—Paul Latour, *Citizen*

Samy Selvavadivel, president of the Eelam Tamil Association of Quebec.

## Tamil's story of torture fabricated to poison diplomatic ties, envoy says

By Stephen Bindman  
Citizen staff writer

After weeks of silence, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Canada fought back Monday with an attack against allegations he was involved in torture and human rights abuses in his homeland.

In a toughly-worded statement and an interview with *The Citizen*, retired Gen. Tissa Weeratunga accused Tamil separatists now living in Canada of raising the false accusations against him to poison diplomatic relations and "distort and disrupt the bond of friendship" between the two countries.

"There is no truth at all. This is a total fabrication. It is rubbish," Weeratunga said in an interview Monday evening in the wood-pannelled living room of his Range Road home, surrounded by his wife, three children and Labrador Retriever dog.

"It's all a ploy, a planned gambit. It

is coming from people who are claiming a separate state. This is to further their own political aims and discredit the country through me."

A three-page statement released by the high commission also said a Tamil refugee who flew to Canada on the weekend to confront Weeratunga, is wanted by Sri Lankan authorities in connection with several robberies and "terrorist incidents."

In a sworn affidavit in English to Amnesty International, the refugee, Umpathisivan Pararajasegaran, says Weeratunga — in 1979 the army commander in the northern district of Jaffna while a state of emergency was in force to counter violence and unrest among the Tamil minority — personally supervised sessions in which he was tortured.

He described being hung upside

(Tamil, page A2)

## Tamil

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down for hours on end, being beaten with sand-filled pipes and every other imaginable weapon and being tied in a bag and dragged behind a military vehicle.

But in the interview, Weeratunga said the torture allegations are just a "ruse" to divert the attention of Canadians away from the backlash over the 155 Tamil refugees who arrived by boat off the coast of Newfoundland last summer.

And the former general insisted the accusations haven't hurt him or his family.

"I have a clear conscience, why should it hurt," he said confidently. "Why should I dignify anybody's claim. Just because a guy said I've done something?"

The high commission's statement was released less than an hour before Pararajasegaran, who now lives in Paris, held a press conference to detail how Weeratunga supervised the torture sessions.

At the crowded press conference, a spokesman for the Tamils of Canada association angrily denounced the statement as "obnoxiously false" and challenged Weeratunga to meet personally with Pararajasegaran during his two-week stay here "if he has the guts."

They challenged Weeratunga to give up his diplomatic immunity and answer the charges in a Canadian court, though they did not explain how that could be done.

"If he hides or he doesn't take any telephone calls from the media, his high commission is paralyzed," said Rev. Phillip Ratna-

palla. "Let him come forward and meet this man in front of him. We challenge him."

Ratnapalla said several other victims of torture are prepared to testify about Weeratunga before the Commons human rights committee, but only behind closed doors because they fear for the safety of relatives still in Sri Lanka.

But Weeratunga insisted he saw no need to meet with the Tamils. "Why should I dignify this man. I'm a representative of a country. I don't need to meet separatists."

The high commission's press attaché, Lester Corea, reading from a telex from the Sri Lankan government, told *The Citizen* Pararajasegaran was arrested in 1979 and suspected of being a close associate of a terrorist leader wanted for the murder of a police officer.

But Pararajasegaran told reporters he has never been involved in any crimes and was unaware of any warrants for his arrest in his homeland.

Weeratunga admitted he "visited" the military operation that led to Pararajasegaran's arrest on a refugee farm, but said he never saw him subsequently.

Although the Tamils say no charges were ever levelled in Sri Lanka against the general for fear of retribution, Weeratunga said that attitude is an insult to the country's judicial system, where the chief justice and attorney general are both Tamil.

"He had enough time to complain of torture if he was tortured indeed. We have a totally independent judiciary and we're committed to that."

More than 400 civilians were killed and another 1,000 kidnapped by Tamil separatists last year, the high commission's statement says.