



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka – LKA37657 – Karuna Group
27 October 2010

1. Please provide any information about the Karuna group.

The Karuna Group is a Tamil paramilitary group active in Sri Lanka. The Karuna Group was formed in 2004 under the name Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (Tamil Peoples Liberation Tigers or TMVP) when top LTTE commander in the Eastern Province, Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan [Colonel Karuna], defected from the LTTE. The TMVP registered as a political party representing the Karuna faction but in 2008 split into two factions with Pillayan remaining the main TMVP representative and the Karuna faction re-emerging. TMVP and Karuna are now quite separate despite having the same paramilitary origins. The TMVP is now foremost a political party with around 1,000-1,500 supporters. Pillayan is the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province while Karuna holds the position of Deputy Minister of Resettlement in the UPFA government.¹

The past activities of the TMVP/Karuna Group are well-documented in human rights reports.² The government used these and other paramilitary groups to assist its military forces in fighting the LTTE. According to the US Department of State (USDOS) human rights report for 2008, the TMVP used a network of informants in the east to discover and eliminate possible LTTE operatives or sympathisers; the TMVP ran extortion rings; there were credible reports that the government provided protection, intelligence, and military training to TMVP cadres who committed extrajudicial killings, abductions, extortion, and torture.³ While the TMVP and the Karuna Faction are predominately based in the east, there have been reports that TMVP/Karuna Group cadres operated in Colombo as well.⁴ Both factions continue to operate.⁵

On 25 June 2010 DFAT advised that local reports indicate continued human rights abuses by paramilitaries in the north and east of Sri Lanka, and in Colombo, although incidents have decreased since the end of the conflict. The DFAT report states that:

¹ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, 'SRI LANKA: Paramilitary groups in post-war Sri Lanka', (Sourced from DFAT advice of 20 May 2010), 21 May – Attachment 1.

² UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, 'UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka', UNHCR website, April <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de0b6b2.html> – Accessed 15 April – Attachment 2; International Crisis Group 2008, *Sri Lanka's Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict*, Asia Report N°159, 15 October – Attachment 3.

³ US Department of State 2009, *Country reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Sri Lanka*, February, Section 1.g – Attachment 4

⁴ International Crisis Group 2007, *Sri Lanka's Human Rights Crisis*, Asia Report No. 135, 14 June, p. 11 – Attachment 5.

⁵ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, 'SRI LANKA: Paramilitary groups in post-war Sri Lanka', (Sourced from DFAT advice of 20 May 2010), 21 May – Attachment 1.

Reporting from local services indicates that cases of extrajudicial killings, disappearances and the use of torture continue to be recorded in certain areas, including northern Sri Lanka, parts of the east (Batticaloa and Ampara) and Colombo. Reporting suggests some of these incidents may have been connected to paramilitary groups, as well as criminal elements operating in these areas. There have also been a number of allegations of Sri Lankan security forces involvement in incidents.⁶

A May 2010 DFAT report provides the following information on this group in post-war Sri Lanka:

3. Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pullikal (TMVP) and the Karuna faction

The TMVP was formed by Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (aka Karuna Amman), who was a high ranking LTTE Commander in the east until he broke away from the LTTE to join the Government in 2004, taking several thousand cadres with him. Initially known as the Karuna Faction, the group is understood to have played a crucial role in supporting the Government military campaign which regained the eastern province from the LTTE in 2007. The TMVP was subsequently registered as a political party representing the Karuna Faction. While Karuna was out of the country for an extended period, his deputy Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan (alias Pillayan) was appointed Chief Minister of the Eastern Province in 2008. When Karuna returned to Sri Lanka, tensions with Pillayan saw the group split into two factions, with Pillayan remaining the main TMVP representative and the Karuna Faction re-emerging. Karuna joined the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (the ruling party of President Rajapaksa) with an estimated 2000 of his followers in 2009. He currently holds the position of Deputy Minister of Resettlement in the UPFA government.

4. The Karuna Faction remained armed during the conflict period, citing threat from the LTTE. The TMVP formally disarmed in March 2009, although some have alleged that elements of the TMVP retain arms. The Karuna Faction has not undergone any formal process of disarming. Domestic and international observers have connected both groups to incidents of violence in the east and both are reported to continue to work in coordination with elements of the security forces in some respects. Both the TMVP and Karuna Faction are predominantly based in the east, with the Karuna Faction reported to be particularly active in Batticaloa and Ampara Districts. Since the end of the military conflict, the Karuna Faction has developed a presence in Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya and the Vanni region. Currently, Karuna is understood to have about 1,000 active cadres supporting him. Pillayan is reported to have a party support base of around 1,000-1,500, with several hundred of these remaining armed.⁷

Attachments

1. DIAC Country Information Service 2010, 'SRI LANKA: Paramilitary groups in post-war Sri Lanka, (Sourced from DFAT advice of 20 May 2010), 21 May. (CISNET Sri Lanka CX243874)

⁶ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, 'SRI LANKA: Extrajudicial killings, disappearances and abductions' (Sourced from DFAT advice of 24 June 2010), 25 June – Attachment 6.

⁷ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, 'SRI LANKA: Paramilitary groups in post-war Sri Lanka', (Sourced from DFAT advice of 20 May 2010), 21 May – Attachment 1.

2. UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, 'UNHCR eligibility guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka', UNHCR website, April <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49de0b6b2.html> – Accessed 15 April.
3. International Crisis Group 2008, *Sri Lanka's Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict*, Asia Report N°159, 15 October.
4. US Department of State 2009, *Country reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Sri Lanka*, February, Section 1.g.
5. International Crisis Group 2007, *Sri Lanka's Human Rights Crisis*, Asia Report No. 135, 14 June.
6. DIAC Country Information Service 2010, 'SRI LANKA: Extrajudicial killings, disappearances and abductions' (Sourced from DFAT advice of 24 June 2010), 25 June. (CISNET Sri Lanka CX245431)