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## Why Canada's Tamils are upset

Roy Ratnavel, National Post



The freedom we enjoy in Canada is precious to me. I state this at the outset, because I grew up in a country where freedom is a rare commodity, and the slaughter of innocents is common.

I lived almost half of my life in Sri Lanka, and spent three months of that time in jail. There, I suffered various forms of unspeakable torture at the age of 17, for no other reason than that I was a member of the country's Tamil minority.

Days after my release, with the help of my father, I went to the Canadian High Commission in Colombo and was granted an interview with an immigration officer by the name of Robert Orr (not to be confused with the hockey player, as I always stress when telling this story). Mr. Orr asked me if I could provide evidence of my incarceration. I took my shirt off and revealed my upper body, and there was plenty of evidence. I will spare readers the details, but it was enough for him to grant me a visa to Canada.

I am ecstatic that this great nation has given me a rebirth. I am Canadian first; my loyalty is non-negotiable. Yet the constant suffering of the people and the families I left behind troubles me.

Tamils who were present at the Toronto protest on Monday -- an event criticized in a recent

National Post editorial ("Terrorism Double-Standard," March 18)-- were very emotional. Many have their own personal stories of tyranny. Some have family members who have been killed recently, or know of someone imprisoned in what can only be described as concentration camps. They cling to the hope that Canada will listen to their cries.

While we debate about which protestors were waving which flags, lives are being lost: According to the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner, at least 2,800 Tamils were killed by the military offensive conducted by Sri Lanka within the past few months alone.

Sri Lanka, it should be mentioned, is also a friend of Iran and Pakistan. In April, 2008, Sri Lanka gave a red-carpet welcome to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad -- a Holocaust denier and an ardent supporter of the elimination of Israel. It's true in politics, as in life, that people can be judged by the company they keep.

It is high time for Canada to exert political and economic sanctions against Sri Lanka for its inexcusable and ongoing contribution to large-scale humanitarian misery. Regardless of how one feels about the Tamil Tigers,

Canadians must speak up against Sri Lankan government savagery. It is the only position that is consistent with our own democratic ideals.

April 18, 1988, is a date I will never forget. My father peered through the glass and waved his final goodbye to me at the Colombo airport. His facial expression forever will be etched in my memory. Like me, he was no doubt experiencing a complex mix of emotions at the time. I bet he was happy for me, fearful for his own life and angry that, finally, it had come to this.

Following my departure, he was shot dead at the age of 53, right in front of my mother -- a horrible incident my mother can't let go and that I keep reliving. When I heard the news of his death, I sobbed while clinging to the kitchen counter-top like it was a life preserver.

For the sake of the Tamils still living in Sri Lanka, I hope that Canadians will spare them a thought, and force our government to raise its voice against an ongoing tragedy.

roy\_ratnavel@hotmail.com