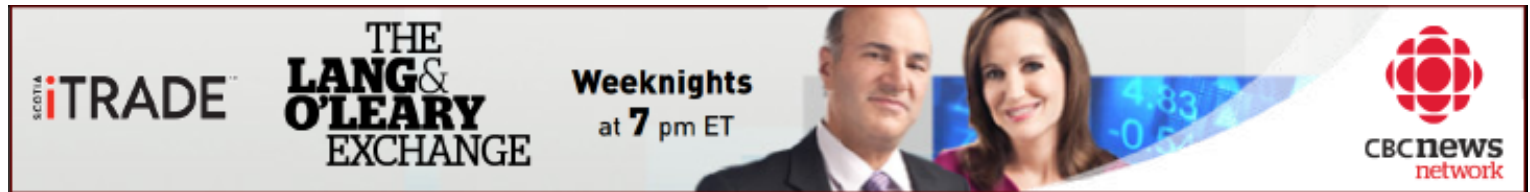


[skip to main content \(press enter\)](#)

Regina

change

13°c Partly Cloudy



- [CBC.ca](#)
- [News news drop down menu](#)
- [Sports sports drop down menu](#)
- [Radio radio drop down menu](#)
- [TV tv drop down menu](#)
- [My Region my region drop down menu](#)
- [More more drop down menu](#)
- [Watch watch drop down menu](#)
- [Listen listen drop down menu](#)

Search CBC.ca Submit Search 

- [Sign Up](#)
- [Log In](#)

Tamil migrants to be investigated: Toews

Hundreds arriving in B.C. seek refugee protection

Last Updated: Friday, August 13, 2010 | 7:23 PM PT [Comments 2900](#) [Recommend 600](#)

[CBC News](#)



The MV Sun

Sea as seen before it was escorted into a B.C. harbour. (Department of National Defence) An estimated 490 Tamil migrants who arrived on a ship seeking refugee shelter in Canada will be investigated to determine whether there are "human smugglers or terrorists" among them, Public Safety Minister Vic Toews said Friday.

Speaking to reporters in Esquimalt, B.C., Toews said Canada has been "very welcoming" of refugees, but the government "must ensure that our refugee system is not hijacked by criminals or terrorists."

The minister said the government will consider whether "further improvements" are needed to disrupt and deter criminal organizations and enterprises such as human smuggling, but gave no further details.

The Canada Border Services Agency will take the time necessary to identify and process all individuals who were on the ship in accordance with Canadian law, Toews said.

He pledged that any individuals who endanger national security or who have engaged in human smuggling "will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

May have ties to Tamil Tigers

The migrants are believed to be Tamils from Sri Lanka who left their homeland in May aboard the MV Sun Sea. They arrived earlier Friday at CFB Esquimalt after spending almost 90 days at sea.



Tamil migrants look over the side of the MV Sun Sea. (Jonathan Hayward/Canadian Press) The government has said it believes some of the migrants are members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as the Tamil Tigers, which has been outlawed in Canada as a terrorist group since 2006.

A CBSA official told reporters those who were on board will be fingerprinted, photographed and screened for criminality. The examination is expected to take up to 72 hours because there are usually difficulties in confirming identities, the official said.

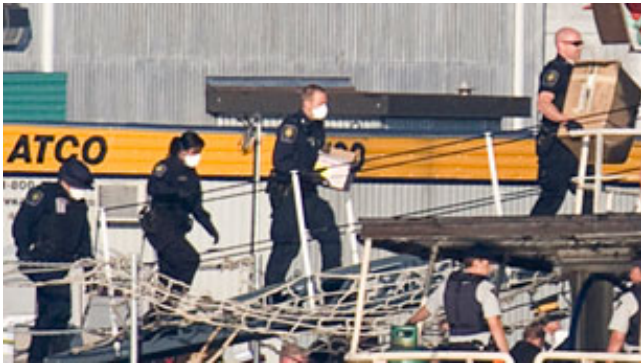
Toews said the best way to deal with migrant ships is to wait until they enter Canadian waters.

"Intervening on the high seas brings certain legal obligations and a

number of legal problems, and so it's better to intercept them, I'm advised, inside of Canadian territorial waters."

The 59-metre, Thai-owned cargo ship arrived at the base on Vancouver Island shortly before 6:30 a.m., escorted by two naval tugboats. It was docked about two hours later.

Border officers and other officials donned surgical masks and gloves before boarding the ship, in light of reports there may be passengers with infectious diseases on board. Some reports indicate several passengers may be infected with tuberculosis.



Canada Border Services agents wear surgical masks as they board the MV Sun Sea. (Jonathan Hayward/Canadian Press)

During his news conference, Toews did not discuss the migrants' conditions, saying only that the high number of passengers faced "certain difficulties in terms of living conditions" from such a long journey on a vessel that size.

Officials briefing reporters after the minister's appearance also would not give specifics of the conditions on the vessel, but said there was "not a large medical need" for those on board.

The migrants are expected to be transported from CFB Esquimalt to

various destinations, including Victoria General Hospital and the Wilkinson Road Jail in Victoria.

The CBC's Chris Brown reported that a family with several young children on the ship appeared to have their belongings in plastic bags.

Some people were later seen at hospitals, he said.

"We counted a dozen or so people from the ship arriving at a Victoria hospital but their condition was unknown," said Brown.

Human smuggling a 'criminal activity'

Naval and RCMP officers had boarded the ship at about 9:30 p.m. ET Thursday, according to the Prime Minister's Office, to take control and steer it to Esquimalt.



The MV Sun Sea is escorted past Fisgard Lighthouse toward CFB Esquimalt on Friday morning. (Jonathan Hayward/Canadian Press) Capt. Dermot Mulholland, spokesman for the Department of National Defence, described the boarding incident as "very calm," saying the vessel was "compliant" when Canadian officials took control.

Many on board are believed to have paid as much as \$50,000 each for the trip.

Sri Lanka's high commissioner to Canada, Chitranganee Wagiswara, said that money would go toward to the Tamil Tigers and chided the federal government for not turning the ship away. "Human smuggling is a criminal activity," he said.

Calling human smuggling "despicable," "dangerous" and "irresponsible," Gary Anandasangaree, general counsel for the Canadian Tamil Congress, said the government should assess those aboard the ship "on their own merits and in accordance with Canada's laws and our international obligations."

Anandasangaree said the congress is "ready, willing and able" to assist the migrants, including by providing translators, access to legal representation and initial financial assistance to ensure their rights are respected.

"The legal system is apt in addressing these issues and will do so in due course," he told reporters in Esquimalt on Friday.

He added his organization has not had any direct contact with those who were on board, but said it was "heart-wrenching" to think of so many people being on board a 53-metre vessel for so long.

"It really shows the desperation people have in fleeing Sri Lanka and fleeing for their safety," he said.

Let refugee process work: Rae

Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae said the need for investigating and prosecuting human smugglers should not affect the rights of those seeking asylum in Canada.

"I think it is important for everybody to take a deep breath, let the process of law proceed, understand that we do have a process that can work if we have the people to do the job, and we do, and making sure we are making the determination fairly," Rae told CBC News in an interview from Kingston, Ont.

NDP immigration critic Olivia Chow said the government should punish those involved in human smuggling but show mercy to their victims.

"If they are genuine refugees, they should be allowed to stay. and if not, let's deport them," Chow said. "We have a law that allows us to do that."

As a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees, Canada must process all refugee claimants who reach Canadian soil.

Previous Tamil migrants said they were fleeing persecution after the country's bloody 26-year civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers.

However, the Tamil Tigers were defeated in May 2009 and a recent UN report states that, after the war, Tamils would no longer be presumed to be fleeing imminent harm.

The report says, in part: "Given the cessation of hostilities, Sri Lankans originating from the north of the country are no longer in need of international protection under broader refugee criteria or complementary forms of protection solely on the basis of risk of indiscriminate harm."

With files from The Canadian Press

- [Post a comment](#)
- [2900Comments have been posted](#)
- [Recommend this story](#)

[600 People have recommended this story](#)**Story comments (2900)**Sort: [Most recent](#) | [First to last](#) | [Agreed](#)**[Toptekkie](#) wrote:** Posted 2010/08/16

at 7:20 PM ET Disgusting that we would even ask these individuals to even declare their origins or aspirations.

They have come here because like every other Canadian before them they believe that life will be better here.

I am sickened to the core to hear how xenophobic the Canadian population is.

We are the most privileged of the world's societies with regard to natural resources and it is shameful that we cannot be open to share these with the downtrodden on the planet.

We all have one home and that's Earth - better start getting used to it and accepting that we are all ONE people

- [1](#)
- [8](#)

[1 Agree 8 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)**[thevikingpoet](#) wrote:** Posted 2010/08/16

at 1:52 PM ET floodedsky wrote:

"I, for one, liked Canada much better 25 years ago before these foreigners invaded en masse and I don't care what they think about it. Why should I? This is my one and only country. I don't have anywhere to "go back to." I have a vested (not invested) interest in my native land and other Canadians SHOULD feel the same way."

Dude, unless you are of aboriginal decent (which I doubt) it is NOT your land or country. Your forefathers stole it albeit a couple hundred years ago.

I suggest you read a Canadian history book.

- [12](#)
- [4](#)

[12 Agree 4 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)**[thevikingpoet](#) wrote:** Posted 2010/08/16

at 1:46 PM ET xaphod wrote:

"This makes me want to leave Canada, and I was born here to 2 parents that were born here."

So first of all...I think the part that you forgot to add in your comment was that your grandparents benefited from people that stole this land from the natives in generations past.

Also, go ahead and leave Canada dude! NO ONE is stopping you! Perhaps you'll learn something about the world and Canada if you live abroad. Perhaps you can take some of the bigots who have posted comments on this story with you!

- [8](#)
- [6](#)

[8 Agree 6 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)

tiuu11 wrote: Posted 2010/08/16

at 9:54 AM ET I would support Canada welcoming Tamil refugees in ships until such a time as it becomes a problem, as it did in Australia apparently.

I understand that Tamil refugees have an acceptance rate of 80%.

Though my parents came here as independent immigrants from Britain, small numbers of my ethnic group came here from Sweden on old refurbished yachts, to avoid the threat of being sent back to their homeland then occupied by the Soviet Union. Some of these boat people landed in Ireland, others in Canada.

- [4](#)
- [13](#)

[4 Agree 13 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)

Albert S wrote: Posted 2010/08/16

at 9:43 AM ET DependablePilot wrote: Posted 2010/08/15

at 11:18 PM ET

It would seem the Canadian Tamil Congress and CBC want Canada to accept every single refugee on this planet.

Truth sucks eh?

- [22](#)
- [0](#)

[22 Agree 0 Disagree Policy Report abuse](#)

- First
- Previous
- [1](#)
- [2](#)
- [3](#)
- [4](#)
- [5](#)
- [6](#)
- [7](#)
- [8](#)
- [9](#)
- [10](#)
- [Next](#)
- [Last](#)

Comments on this story are pre-moderated. Before they appear, comments are reviewed by moderators to

ensure they meet our [submission guidelines](#).

Comments are **open** and welcome until Friday, August 20, 2010 at 11:59 p.m. ET.
We reserve the right to close comments before then.

Post your comment

Note: The CBC does not necessarily endorse any of the views posted. By submitting your comments, you acknowledge that CBC has the right to reproduce, broadcast and publicize those comments or any part thereof in any manner whatsoever. Please note that comments are pre-moderated/reviewed and published according to our [submission guidelines](#).

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Log in](#) | [Sign up](#)

Comment:

[Submission policy](#)