

Canadian on trial in Sri Lanka

The Canadian Press

A Canadian accused of sedition for alleging that government forces massacred members of the Tamil minority in his native Sri Lanka has no complaints about the treatment he's received in a Sri Lankan court, his daughter said Tuesday.

However, Nirmala Pitt said her father, Paul Nallanayagam, a Tamil and Methodist lay worker at a girls' orphanage in eastern Sri Lanka, plans to return to Canada with his wife, if and when he is cleared of the charges, because the couple fear for their safety.

The *Toronto Star* reported in a dispatch on Monday from the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, that the former University of Toronto accountant was arrested last May 22 under emergency regulations being used to fight Tamil separatists in the northern part of the island country.

The 61-year-old Canadian citizen had been working as director of the orphanage for seven years and was also president of a local human rights group in the town of Kalmunai when he alleged that 23 Tamil youths had been rounded up in a nearby village by security forces, made to dig their own trench graves and then slaughtered.

He also complained that security forces had destroyed a predominantly Tamil village in their anti-guerrilla campaign.

Nallanayagam was immediately arrested and charged with "incitement to bring the government of Sri Lanka into hatred or contempt and passing on rumors likely to cause public alarm" and placed in a minimum security prison.

However, his trial only got under way March 17.

An External Affairs Department official,

Terry Jones, said Canadian diplomats in Colombo and Ottawa have been keeping a close watch on the case and have pressed Sri Lankan officials on humanitarian grounds to speed up bringing Nallanayagam to trial because of his age and because he suffers from a heart condition.

Jones said the Canadian high commission also thwarted an attempt to have him transferred to a maximum security prison before he was released on bail last fall.

Pitt said her father was not associated with the separatists.

Tamil extremists have been waging a sporadic guerrilla war against the Sri Lankan government for years. The majority of Sri Lankans are Sinhalese.

Terry Jones, a consular operations official with the department, said the trial is expected to last three or four weeks.