



Press Release: the government must take immediate steps to rectify the situation that has arisen concerning the uncertainty of commencing the proposed provincial council and local government elections

The commencement of elections in due time in the appropriate manner, is a practice that reflects the proper establishment of democracy. Asserting the contribution of the citizenry in the said election and creating an environment that is conducive for free and fair elections, are inevitable obligations of any government. It must be emphatically stated that the true meaning of the sovereignty of the people as specified in the constitution of this country could only be realized in taking the relevant measures in the manner mentioned above.

As a matter of fact, all the election observing organizations in the country, express their profound disappointment over the prevailing uncertainty in relation to the current situation of commencing elections.

Local government elections – The general public is eagerly looking forward to see the elections being held with regard to the local government institutions under a new electoral system with greater representation for women in politics and the subsequent revitalization of their activities with a new vigor.

Yet however, both the current and previous regimes have been prolonging the commencement of these elections while attributing its infeasibility to the technical issues and irregularities. By and large, there is one critical step that is required to be taken at present in order to enable the commencement of local government elections, which is passing the draft bill of electoral reforms that has already been presented to the parliament. The responsibility of accomplishing this endeavor lies with the leaders of all political parties and the other members of the parliament.

Several years have elapsed since the discourse on the new reforms of the electoral process has been initiated. The amount of finances invested in this regard also has been enormous. The issues arisen owing to the absence of the public representatives in the local

government institutions also are endless. While the situation remains thus, all the Election Observing Organizations are of the unanimous opinion that the government's act of refraining from commencing the local government elections, is a deliberate and strategic curtailment of the expectations of general public.

It causes a direct infringement of people's sovereignty as asserted in the constitution and it also imposes a grave risk upon the development process of the country as well.

Provincial Council Elections: Just a few weeks are remaining for the end of the terms of election in the north-central, eastern and Sabaragamuwa provincial councils. Accordingly, the Election Commission intends to announce the call for nominations in the first week of October. Meanwhile, the government has presented a cabinet paper highlighting three key points: introducing reforms to the electoral process to commence provincial council elections in alignment with the local government elections, increasing the representation of women up to 30% in the process of nominations and holding the elections for all provincial councils on the same day, are the three points referred to above. The election observations organizations in the country have been advocating for the implementation of measures set out by these points for a long time and have been urging every government that have come to power thus far. These proposals will be much more conducive for the creation of a people-friendly provincial council. Hence on behalf of all the Election Observing Organizations, we express our appreciative gratitude to the government for proposing them sans further delay. While thus saluting the government for bringing forth such measures, there's a very significant fact that needs to be reiterated with this regard. The measures proposed by the aforementioned points, could not be implemented in such haste with such short notice. The government needs to understand that the voters, who have been confused by the continual prolongment of the local government elections, are observing such measures with doubt and disdain. The commencement of all the provincial council elections within one day, which is one of the points presented above, seems a very progressive step at a glance. Such a measure could save a considerable amount of money for the government and it could also help prevent the abuse of state resources which can be seen in relation to the concentration of unnecessary effort on political scams to attract voters in specific provinces. Yet however, such a decision could only be made at a series of formal discussions that could be held in the future concerning the electoral reforms that introduces a new electoral system. If such a decision is made so suddenly, the voters could expect a provincial council election to be held only on the 8th of October in the year 2019 along with the dissolution of Uva provincial council. Accordingly it is the voter to whom an injustice is caused as a result of this decision made by the government. It so happens because the right to exercise the power of people's sovereignty is prolonged for several more years owing to the postponement of the elections.

If the government is honestly deliberating on commencing the provincial council elections on the same day for all the provinces, what needs to be done is dissolving all the provincial councils in parallel with the dissolution of the provincial council that is due to be dissolved most recently, and commencing the election on the same day in every provincial council. Or else, the government can proceed with the existing system and commence the election on

the same day in accordance with a properly scheduled timetable in all the provinces after holding a discussion on the election laws and the reforms of the electoral system.

It was not recently that all the Election Observing Organizations emphasized the need to reform the prevailing electoral system. And scheduling all the provincial council elections on the same day was not the only proposal made by the Election Observing Organizations with this regard. Therefore, it is indeed disheartening to note that certain elements of the government are making claims to indicate that the said proposal has also been presented and hence endorsed by the Election Observing Organizations. Regardless of the severity of chrysis surrounding the masses, people in this country still do have faith on elections. Ever since the general election that was held in the year 1947 to elect a diverse legislature with a wider representation, it was through democratic elections that the transfer of power took place in this country. Hence it must be insistently stated that the prolongment of elections that is being continued while alluding to the technical issues, does not fulfill the expectations of the citizens of this country although such an act could be perceived as a means of achieving the narrow political gains. Moreover, it also violates the laws, traditions and treaties by which the government is abided as signatories in both national and international levels.

It should be reminded that government is a body of trusteeship that has been appointed as per the franchise of the citizens, in order to fulfill the wishes and expectations of the general public during a tenure specified by the constitution and not an arbitrary entity that holds an authority to seize the inalienable rights to which the citizens are entitled. And we strongly urge the government to commence the elections in due time in the proper order and thereby, take the appropriate measures with accountability to protect the rights of the citizens of this country.

On behalf of all the Election Observation Organizations:

Rohana Hettiarachchi – PEOPLE'S ACTION FOR FREE & FAIR ELECTIONS (PAFFREL)

Manjula Gajanayake – CENTRE FOR MONITORING ELECTION VIOLENCE (CMEV)

Keerthi Thennakoon – CAMPAIGN FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTION (CAFFE)

Manori Kalugampitiya – MOVEMENT FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTION (MFFE)

Asoka Obeyesekere – TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL SRI LANKA (TISL)

Daya Herath – MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN LANKA (MDL)