

Sri Lanka: Down with racist political agendas!

Thursday 15 January 2015, by [SILVA Redley](#), [SILVA Wilfred](#) (Date first published: 11 January 2015).

Statement by Lanka Socialists Forum

Mr Maithreepala Sirisena in his Presidential election campaign stood for democracy, good governance and the ushering in of a 'Maithree' era devoid of corruption and nepotism. However, on 9th January, 2015, on the very day he was sworn in as the new President, Mr Champika Ranawaka of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) gave the Tamil and the Muslim peoples the first slap of the 'Maithree' era in their faces.

At a press conference of the JHU, held on that day, Mr Ranawaka dismissed the view that the vote of the North-East Tamil and the Muslim peoples was decisive in securing a victory for Mr Sirisena as false. According to him, the decisive vote in Mr Sirisena's victory was 9 lakhs of votes won by the collective opposition including the JHU. Further, engaging in statistical gymnastics he claimed that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) jointly contributed only 12% while, in his own words, 'our people' contributed 88% of the vote to the total gained by Mr Sirisena.

However, who are these 'our people' that Mr Ranawaka spoke about? Are the Tamil and the Muslim peoples not 'our people'? This was a cynical attempt made by Mr Ranawaka to undermine the contribution of the Tamil and the Muslim people for Mr Sirisena's victory and to dampen any efforts by the pro-Sirisena ruling elite to forge ahead a Sri Lankan Nation.

For democracy and good governance to flourish in a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious country, it is essential that the 'right to self-determination' of the minority nationalities is respected and their grievances are resolved in a just and fair manner.

As long as the Sri Lankan ruling elite fails to address the long-term political aspirations and the immediate grievances of the North-East Tamil people, the Up-country Tamil people and the Muslim people by implementing a programme of genuine socio-economic and political reforms, the talk of democracy and good governance is meaningless, let alone ushering in an era of 'Maithree'!

If the Sri Lankan ruling elite is genuinely interested in protecting the unity, sovereignty and the integrity of Sri Lanka within a liberal democratic framework under Mr Sirisena's watch, they should first remove all obstacles to the proper functioning of the Northern and the Eastern Provincial Councils by replacing the military Governor with a civilian Governor, restoring civil administrations in the said provinces, handing back land usurped and occupied by the armed forces to their rightful owners and implementing the 13th amendment in full. These steps would help win the hearts and minds of the Tamil and the Muslim people and encourage their participation in the rebuilding of democratic institutions and structures in their provinces and, thereby make a real contribution to an era of good governance in the country as a whole.

It is also important to emphasize, in this context, that the only guarantee of democracy and good governance for all the people of Sri Lanka is eternal vigilance by progressive forces and the

combined struggle of all the oppressed people on all sides of the ethnic, linguistic and religious divides for democratic rights and civil liberties are not offered on a platter by the ruling elite. A democratic space has opened up in Sri Lanka as a result of the defeat of the Rajapaksa regime. The progressive forces have to forge ahead a new people's movement to occupy this space and deepen and broaden the democratic rights and the civil liberties of all the people in all parts of Sri Lanka. The potential is there, but time is running out and the space is limited as and the reactionary forces are already scheming to realize their racist political agendas.

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