



Canadian Tamil Congress
கனடியத் தமிழர் பேரவை
Congrès Tamoul Canadien
"The unified voice of Canadian Tamils"

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Tamils Disenfranchised in Sri Lankan Election: Tamil Canadians

Tamil Canadians strongly condemn the blatant intimidation and restrictions that significantly left many Tamils disenfranchised in yesterday's election. The present Sri Lankan government has made a mockery out of the democratic process by engaging in wide-spread violence, corruption and intimidation in a bid to hold on to power.

The multiple bomb blasts in Jaffna and Vavuniya were among the more egregious examples of voter intimidation intended to stop Tamils from exercising their democratic right. Other incidents include threatening voters, attacking shops and vehicles.

“There are clear indications Tamils have been disenfranchised in their traditional areas,” said David Poopalapillai, National Spokesperson for the Canadian Tamil Congress. “With intimidation and attacks, the Sri Lankan government deliberately ensured Tamils in the North-East did not have an atmosphere where they felt safe to exercise their right to vote.”

“Free and fair elections are absolutely necessary in a functioning democracy, they shouldn't be manipulated to suit the will of a power-hungry dictatorship,” said Poopalapillai. “The Rajapaksa family's embrace of corruption, intimidation and wide-spread violence to achieve its electoral aims should make the international community realize how fundamentally undemocratic the Sri Lanka government is. It should now be clear that Sri Lanka is run by a dictatorship.”

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Voter turnout was reported to be as low as four to eight per cent in Kilinochchi, 18 per cent in Jaffna, and 55 per cent in Batticaloa. The rest of the country saw more than 70 per cent of voters turn out at the polls. As such, Tamil Canadians urge the international community to not accept these results and place pressure to ensure an election free of intimidation, restrictions and vote manipulation.

“After a brutal war which claimed so many lives, Tamils deserve to have their voices heard and their votes counted,” said Poopalapillai. “The intimidation and restrictions intended to stop Tamils from voting shows how little value Tamils have in Sri Lanka to those bent on holding on to power at any cost.”

“By deliberately disenfranchising voters, the present Sri Lankan government has ensured Tamils will continue to feel like second-class citizens on the island.”

The internally displaced persons (IDPs), who still have restrictions on their movement, were among those who faced multiple barriers in their attempts to vote. According to the Centre For Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV), authorities kept the IDPs waiting for hours before providing transport to travel and cast their votes. In one instance, voters, who waited for hours for transport, were told polls were closed upon their arrival at the voting station. Authorities also sought to delay IDPs on their way to vote, subjecting them to multiple checks. CMEV also received reports that several residing in Jaffna with a vote in Kilinochchi were unable to vote.

On Monday, the CMEV denounced the election-related violence that had spread throughout the country. Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, a co-convenor of the CMEV, said the blatant violation of election laws was visible everywhere. He further went on to note that the level of violence was worse than during previous elections, and that the state authorities had disregarded the orders of the elections chief to conduct a fair poll. In addition, Reporters Without Borders noted that the Sri Lankan state media outlets were primarily showing presidential propaganda. The organization also observed that 98.5 per cent of the news and current affairs on state-owned TV stations, Rupavahini and ITN, on January 18 and 19 was given over to the president and his supporters.

For more information, please contact 416.240.0078

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