

The Friday Forum

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PRESS RELEASE

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PROVINCIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES

The Friday Forum keenly followed the three Provincial Councils elections in the Northern, North Western and Central Provinces held on 21st September 2013. The encouraging turnout, with voters exercising their franchise in all three provinces, supported the claim that the elections were relatively free and fair. The Friday Forum expresses its appreciation of the role played by the Election Commissioner, the Election Department, all officials, staff and others as well as the local and foreign election monitors. The democratically elected councillors in all three provinces must now carry forward their mandate towards good governance of the provinces and the well-being of the citizens.

In the Northern Province, this is the first Provincial Council election since 1988 and as such gains further significance. Four and a half years after the war, this is a new and small opening for the country to move on reconciliation. However, many challenges remain in ensuring that this democratically created opening is utilised.

The Centre and the Northern Provincial Council should work together to take forward the day to day needs of the war-torn population while working in parallel towards a devolved political settlement within a united Sri Lanka. Crucial here is the devolution of powers in the 13th Amendment. Participating in development with a sense of security is important for the Northern population to identify as citizens of Sri Lanka both in spirit and in practice.

The Government must recognise that its majoritarian agenda after the war has alienated the people of the North. In particular, it must rethink its approach to centralised and top down governance and development, characterised by continuing militarisation and large infrastructure projects that did not seek the participation of the local population in their planning or execution. Furthermore, there needs to be a deep understanding of the challenges of converting the war-time and post-war military administration to the now democratically elected civil administration. Thus demilitarisation is a priority. Next, the powers of the Governor should not be used to undermine devolution. While there are a range of powers from land to police, which are being debated, it is crucial for the Provincial Council to have the necessary finances to administer and develop the Northern Province.

The TNA, while having gained an overwhelming mandate in the North, needs self-scrutiny about some of its divisive election rhetoric. The TNA should distance itself from the LTTE and its separatist politics and lead the Tamil people towards reconciliation. Next, the TNA which has

historically been a party in the opposition and now has the major challenge of governing the Northern Provincial Council, needs to engage the day to day needs of the people and work towards a programme that can ensure their social and economic progress.

In this context, the various actors in the country, the Government, the TNA, the Defence establishment, the bureaucracy and social institutions must all work together in the spirit of cooperation to ensure this small opening leads to a process of uplifting the Northern population and political reconciliation in the country. This political attitudinal change based on self-scrutiny on the part of the state, political parties and all of us citizens is something we owe to future generations and plural coexistence in our country.



Jayantha Dhanapala

Ahilan Kadirgamar

On behalf of Friday Forum, the Group of Concerned Citizens

Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Mr. Ahilan Kadirgamar, Professor Savitri Goonesekere, Mr. Danesh Casie Chetty, Rt. Reverend Duleep de Chickera, Ms. Suriya Wickremasinghe, Professor Arjuna Aluwihare, Dr. Upatissa Pethiyagoda, Ms. Anne Abayasekara, Dr. Deepika Udagama, Dr. A. C. Visvalingam, Rev. Dr. Jayasiri Peiris, Mr. Faiz-ur Rahman, Professor Camena Guneratne, Ms. Sithie Tiruchelvam, Mr. D Wijayanadana, Professor Ranjini Obeyesekere, Dr. Jayampathy Wickramaratne, Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka, Ms. Damaris Wickremesekera, Ms. Shanthi Dias, Mr. Javid Yusuf, Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran, Mr. J.C. Weliamuna, Dr. Devanesan Nesiiah, Mr. Ranjit Fernando, Ms. Manouri Muttetuwegama, Mr. Chandra Jayaratne