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Tamil American Peace Initiative calls for all Sri Lankans to vote for peaceful change.

The Tamil American Peace Initiative (TAPI), a group of Tamil Americans dedicated to peaceful change in Sri Lanka, today called on all Sri Lankans to participate in the January 26th presidential election.

“Tamil participation in the election is a necessary step in the Tamil struggle for equality, justice, and restoration of peace and stability,” said Dr. Karunyan Arulanantham, a spokesman for TAPI.

TAPI believes that the elections, however ill-timed for the Tamils, are an essential expression of the need for democracy and freedom in Sri Lanka. The group warned, however, that the elections will be legitimate only if they are free, fair, and transparent, conducted without fear of intimidation and reprisals, and with the participation of all people.

TAPI is concerned that the large number of internally displaced Tamils will be disenfranchised in the balloting. The Sri Lankan Government has not registered most of the displaced Tamils as voters. Nor has the government issued national identity cards for them. This could deny many Tamils the right to vote, Dr. Arulanantham said. The group is also concerned about the possibility of post-election violence against Tamils of the sort that has marred past elections. For this reason, TAPI believes it is essential that independent international election monitors observe the balloting. The group called for the government to allow these monitors unfettered access to all polling places throughout the country.

Furthermore, TAPI called for the government and its security forces to allow local and international reporters access to all election events before, during, and after the vote. TAPI demanded that the government allow all candidates freedom to conduct open speeches and meetings to discuss their platforms ahead of Election Day. The group also maintains that the government should lift security check points so that voters can travel to voting places without fear of intimidation.

A Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report on Sri Lanka released in December stated that “Sri Lanka stands at a critical juncture in its efforts to secure a lasting peace.” TAPI hopes that the election will be a first step in establishing a just and peaceful country.

About TAPI

The Tamil American Peace Initiative (TAPI) was formed by a group of Tamil Americans to help bring lasting peace, justice, democracy, and economic development to Sri Lanka; to focus attention on the destruction of Tamil communities and culture caused by six decades of conflict, and to demand an end to the continuing oppression of Tamils on the island.

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