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Tamil American Peace Initiative Urges the New Government to Represent All Citizens of Sri Lanka

The Tamil American Peace Initiative (TAPI), a group of Tamil Americans dedicated to peaceful change in Sri Lanka, called on Sri Lanka's newly reelected President Mahinda Rajapaksa to forge a new path and create the conditions to repair the deep divide between the people of the island.

TAPI deplored the conditions that led to a disappointing turnout among Tamil voters – reportedly as low as 20 percent – in the January 26 presidential election. It noted that election monitors criticized abuses of state power and resources to help the incumbent in the run up to the vote. Concerns about security, the continued illegal internment of Tamils, restrictions on freedom of movement, problems with identity cards, denial of transport to polling stations set up in remote locations, decades of displacement, and other factors also contributed to low Tamil turnout, the group said.

These conditions create skepticism among Tamils in Sri Lanka that Rajapaksa's new government will sincerely pursue policies that will lead to lasting peace and reconciliation, TAPI said.

The group urged the government -- and the international community -- to reach out to the Tamil population and help its communities, which have been devastated by decades of warfare and oppression. The list of needs is long: resettling displaced Tamils and rebuilding their homes, schools and hospitals; demining and demilitarizing in the North-East; establishing a general amnesty for suspected former rebels; restoring fishing rights and land ownership; investing in infrastructure projects; mandating fair compensation for war victims and survivors; authorizing justice to the perpetrators of war crimes; ending programs to change the demographics of the North-East; and developing economic and jobs programs.

TAPI called on the government to rededicate itself to democracy and the rule of law, and to respect the human and civil rights of all its citizens. It called for the government to allow international observers to monitor the return of Tamils to their homes, and for the press, political parties, and NGOs to be able to operate without fear of intimidation in all parts of the island.

"Only by working to restore Tamil rights can the President expect the Tamils to accept that he is in fact a democratic leader and that his government legitimately represents them," Dr. Karunyan Arulanantham, a TAPI spokesman, said. "He must begin this work now. The international community is watching."

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 30 years of war; and to demand an end to the continuing oppression of Tamils on the island.

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