



ANFREL expresses intent to observe 2024 Sri Lankan Presidential Election

26 March 2023

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) expressed its intent to observe the upcoming 2024 Sri Lankan Presidential Election during a meeting with the Elections Commission of Sri Lanka today, 26 March 2024.

ANFREL has observed 12 elections in Sri Lanka since 2001 promoting international principles of democratic elections. ANFREL is a regional election observation group working to defend and protect democratic elections through elections observations, capacity building, and campaign and advocacy.

According to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the Presidential election must occur no less than one month and no more than two months before the expiration of the presidential term. Consequently, the Presidential election is mandated to take place on or before 17 October 2024, as the current presidential term commenced on 18 November 2019.

As we anticipate the forthcoming Sri Lankan elections, we envisage yet another significant stride towards upholding international standards of democratic elections, wherein all stakeholders are afforded the freedom to participate in an accountable, transparent, inclusive, free and fair manner.

In its previous engagements in Sri Lanka, ANFREL has highlighted key electoral reforms including campaign finance regulations, countering hate speech and mis- and disinformation, and upholding the voting rights of migrant workers.

ANFREL welcomes the passage of the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act which seeks to regulate campaign finance spending and provide a level playing field among election candidates. ANFREL is committed to monitor the implementation of these laws during the upcoming Presidential elections, thereby reinforcing the integrity of the electoral process and mitigating the adverse impact of monetary politics.

ANFREL has also recommended the continued partnership between the Election Commission and online platforms to mitigate the potential influence of hate speech and mis- and disinformation with their persistent proliferation online during elections. ANFREL is also looking at other opportunities to address information operations that pollute the information ecosystem during elections.

Over 15 million Sri Lankans are eligible to vote for the Presidential election but voting is still not available for overseas Sri Lankans, particularly migrant workers. It is important to uphold their

voting rights and make the necessary arrangements for out-of-country voting. Advance voting mechanisms should also be extended and expanded for out-of-constituency voters and people working on Election Day.

Lastly, the prolonged delay in the local and provincial elections raises concerns over the government's commitment to conduct elections on time. ANFREL calls on the government of Sri Lanka to provide the Election Commission enough resources to be able to organize the Presidential election on time.

Regular and periodic elections are human rights recognized internationally under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Sri Lanka is a signatory to UDHR and ICCPR has been duly ratified. Upholding both international and local laws, as enshrined in the Sri Lankan Constitution, is essential for scheduling parliamentary elections due next year and addressing the backlog of delayed elections, including the Presidential election.

ANFREL, an international election observation organization headquartered in Bangkok, was established in 1997 to promote and bolster democracy consolidation in Asia through election observation, enhancing local observer capacities, and conducting research and advocacy. Over the past 27 years, we have observed 75 elections across Asia, including pivotal ones in countries grappling with democratic transitions, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka.

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