

Australian Tamil Congress

A Unified Voice for All Tamils



20 April 2010

Given your interest in the Tamil issue, we wish to update you on developments within the island of Sri Lanka and abroad.

Sri Lanka held its Parliamentary Elections on 8 April. While the Government of Sri Lanka states the country is a democracy and Tamils have no reason to fear persecution, it is repeatedly contradicted by reports issued by independent observers.

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) sent 16 international observers from 10 different countries to observe the Parliamentary Election. They issued a [report on 10 April](#) which confirms what Tamils have been voicing repeatedly:

"...observers have doubts about the process at the IDP camps... some of the IDPs were allegedly threatened to vote for a particular party... polling staff were recording ID card number on the counterfoil and ballot papers of IDPs and the general public..."

This crucial information could be used to threaten the voter as the numbers can clearly identify the voter and to whom she/he has voted. Such practice undermines the principle of free and fair, the voters' right to make a free choice and secrecy of the ballot paper. Vavuniya is a Tamil district.

"...regarding the IDPs... polling staff were turning the voters away mentioning that their names were not in the voters list despite them having their ID cards and Poll cards."

"The secrecy of the polling booths was very limited."

"Observers put more concern on lack of law enforcement by the Election Commission and the police force."

Assoc. Prof. Suwendrini Perera from Curtin University [writes in the Age](#):

"The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence reported that in the parliamentary elections held in Sri Lanka on April 8, voter turnout in the Tamil capital of Jaffna was only 10 per cent, while across the country the election drew "probably the lowest turnout figures in recent history" due to the erosion of "public trust and confidence". The centre recorded 85 major incidents during the election period, including attempted murder and intimidation of voters.

"In Sri Lanka's Sunday Times, respected lawyer Kishali Pinto Jayewardene writes of facing an election "presided over by an Elections Commissioner who has lost every shred

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of his credibility as an independent conductor of the electoral process". She adds: "It may well be tempting to sink into the delusion that this country is at peace because no bombs are exploding on the roads . . . and the rate of tourist arrivals has doubled. But the reality is that without principled governance, these become mere superficial markers heralding an outbreak of violence later, even if decades down the line."

"Her assessment is borne out by others. A BBC crew following returning Tamil refugees observed a marked distinction between the poor institutional support they received and the support that Sinhala settlers in the same regions enjoyed from military, government and Buddhist authorities. It should surprise no one that Tamils who have survived violence and dispossession continue to experience well-founded fears of persecution."

Holding elections is itself no assurance of democratic governance. The Rajapakse regime is also [heavily clan-based](#) with family members of the President holding key ministries and public administration roles. The election itself only generated 55 per cent voter turnout overall and 18 per cent in the Tamil-dominated North according to the [Centre for Monitoring Election Violence](#).

Recently a [‘hit list’](#) was leaked revealing the names of 35 journalists, activists and lawyers critical of the government, and Tamil politicians continue to raise alarm over the [rapid ‘Sinhalisation’](#) of the Tamil homeland.

Last weekend a [ballot](#) was held to ascertain whether the Australian Tamil community supported the creation of an [independent Tamil homeland](#). Given the systematic persecution and oppression of Tamils by successive Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan governments for the past 6 decades, many Australian Tamils have felt that an independent homeland for the Tamils may also be the best solution to the influx of [Tamil asylum seekers](#) arriving in to Australia by boat. This ballot will verify that. An independent consulting firm will count the votes and results will be released later this week.

The Australian Tamil Congress calls for the Australian policy makers to pressure Sri Lanka to take genuine steps in ensuring long term peace is restored for all citizens on the island.