

CENTRE FOR MONITORING ELECTION VIOLENCE

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Presidential Election 2015

Media Communiqué No. 02

On 21st December 2014 at 09.12 pm:

Use of Civil Defense Officers for election campaign activities in Ampara District.

CMEV received a complaint from a civil defense officer who wishes to remain anonymous. The complaint is that Civil Defense officers are being used for election activities in support of President Mahinda Rajapaksha. Further he said that new recruitments are being made during this period by Deputy Minister of Labor and Labor Relations, Hon Sarath Weerasekera . According to the complainant Civil Defence officers have been threatened that if they do not get involved in the Rajapaksha campaign, their jobs will be in jeopardy.

It is important to note that these officers have been forced to engage in campaign activities, based at the Minister's office located near the market in Dehiatthakkandiya town. He noted that these officers have been assigned the tasks of making and pasting posters, cutouts and distributing leaflets of President Rajapaksha.

When CMEV contacted Dehiatthakkandiya Police Station, we were informed that many young persons had come to the Police Stations last month to obtain a police report in order to get a job with the Civil Defense Force.

When CMEV contacted Minister Sarath Weerasekera, he completely denied these allegations. Moreover he said that the Civil Defence Officers were free to engage in political activities after 4.30 PM since they are paid on a daily basis. He further said that he could not reject them when they offered their services voluntarily for political activities. He also said that since he is former Director of the Civil Defence Unit (CDU) he does not have any connection with the CDU at present.

The Minister maintains that the CDU has not been engaged in new recruitment since the end of the war in 2009. Nevertheless, he did say that the CDU has selected individuals with vocational qualifications for recruitment after 8th January 2015. According to him this impending recruitment is crucial since a lot of construction work has to be completed. Finally, he stressed that if CDU officers get involved in political activities during their working hours, this would be a violation of both labour and election laws. However, he continued to maintain that in the Ampara district CDU officers had only engaged in political activities after working hours and were therefore not violating the election law.

CMEV was unable to speak to Mr Pathmawansa, Commanding Officer, CDU, Dehiatthakkandiya but spoke with an officer, Mr Shriyantha who said that according to his knowledge officers in his office were not being used for political activities. He further said that they could not engage in political activities in support of any candidate even after working hours, since they are government servants.

CMEV subsequently spoke with an officer in the office of the Additional Election Commissioner in Ampara, who informed CMEV that his office had received many complaints about CDU officers being engaged in political activity in support of the incumbent President. He directed CMEV to Mr Jayasekara, the officer in charge of election complaints. Mr. Jayasekera was not contactable.

CMEV was formed in 1997 by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), the Free Media Movement (FMM) and the Coalition Against Political Violence as an independent and non-partisan organisation to monitor the incidence of election related violence. Currently, CMEV is made up of CPA and INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre.



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Co - Convener