

CENTRE FOR MONITORING ELECTION VIOLENCE

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Presidential Election 2015

Statement at the Conclusion of Polling

8th January 2015

CMEV deployed a total of approximately 4,500 monitors in the field, in polling stations and in mobile teams in the 2015 Presidential Election. On Election Day, CMEV recorded 223 incidents with 101 major incidents and 122 minor incidents. Out of the 223 incidents CMEV documented 124 incidents against the ruling UPFA with unknown actors cited as the alleged perpetrator in 81 incidents. Out of the major incidents, six incidents related to assault and six were of threat and intimidation. Election day witnessed several other incidents of election related violations including electioneering and misuse of state resources with most violations attributed to government politicians and supporters.

Notwithstanding the above and the incidents in the campaign noted below, CMEV believes that the voting in this Presidential Election was not significantly distorted by violence and malpractice and we salute our fellow citizens for ensuring this.

Turnout was relatively high reflecting the level of interest in the election despite the short campaign period. There were challenges however, that impacted the ability of some voters to freely exercise their franchise. For instance, on Election day, CMEV also raised concerns with the Commissioner of Elections about of an estimated 6,000 eligible voters in Puttalam being unable to travel to Mannar to vote. The inability to address this issue resulted in a significant population being deprived of their constitutional right to the franchise and is indicative of the political thuggery embedded in our political culture and practice. CMEV received reports as well of voters having to mark their ballots in full view of election officials and others.

The Northern Province witnessed a number of attempts to impact voter turnout on Election Day through intimidation, threats and confusing messages. The call for a boycott and attempts to discourage voting for the common opposition candidate through the circulation of unsolicited text messages and handbills, all contributed to a charged and confused environment. This coupled with two explosions – one each in Jaffna and Vavuniya, respectively, may have impacted the relatively lower turnout than expected in these districts.

The pre election report released by CMEV on 6 January 2015, raised concerns about shortcomings in the postal voting process, the role of the military in particular in the intimidation of voters and the unprecedentedly large- scale abuse of state property including the employment of the state –

controlled media, even after the end of the official campaign period and on polling day, for relentless government propaganda. CMEV welcomed several court orders against perpetrators of election violence, but is dismayed that no one has yet to be held to account. The campaign witnessed several instances where CMEV monitors were threatened and attacked, human rights defenders and media activists threatened. This election, although not seen as one of the most violent in recent history, witnessed attacks against election officials by supporters of ministers, which CMEV condemned and called for swift action in respect of.

CMEV takes this opportunity to commend the decisive action taken by the Commissioner for Elections, Mahinda Deshapriya to insist on a correction on air by Rupavahini to a false news item broadcast this morning, claiming that UNP Deputy Leader Sajith Premadasa had joined the Government.

The Commissioner of Elections issued a number of instructions prior to voting day in order to minimise abuses of electoral law. Furthermore, recognising international standards on the important role election monitors can play in increasing transparency and public confidence in the electoral process, Mr. Deshapriya granted election monitoring organisations the opportunity to monitor the counting process for the first time in Sri Lanka.

Whilst CMEV notes the constructive responses of the Commissioner and his officials on a number of occasions, we also note that there were instances where our efforts to monitor the process were thwarted. On Election Day, CMEV was unable to access two polling centres – one each in Kalutara and Matara, respectively. When apprised of this, the Commissioner of Elections remedied the anomalies. CMEV places on record its appreciation of the Commissioner's response and looks forward to similar constructive engagement in the future.

In this context, CMEV reiterates the need for independent institutions including independent commissions for elections, police and public services, underscoring the need for constitutional and legal reform to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

We conclude this report by thanking the Commissioner of Elections and the Police for the cooperation extended to CMEV, and very especially to our monitors and the public for their steadfast commitment and support which made our monitoring exercise possible.

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.

CMEV reports and communiqués can be accessed online at www.cmev.org



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