

**FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION:  
RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES  
FOR  
ELECTORAL REFORM IN SRI LANKA**



**People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL)  
Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV)**

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People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL),  
the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV),  
and the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)

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## INTRODUCTION

A fair and open electoral system is the foundation on which democratic societies are built. Elections that reflect the will of the people, and that are conducted without violence or intimidation, strengthen democratic institutions and encourage citizen participation in the democratic process. Although recent elections in Sri Lanka have been judged free and fair by local and international officials, there are still many aspects of the electoral system that require change: women are still under-represented in politics; failed candidates can still become members of Parliament through the National List; and thousands of citizens working overseas are disenfranchised. As the calls for constitutional change continue to grow, the need for a blueprint for electoral reform becomes even more critical. Since this reform will affect the foundation of democracy in Sri Lanka, and since democracy inherently flows from the people, such change should draw on the ideas and perspectives of Sri Lankan citizens.

In this spirit of broad consultation and constructive change, a dialogue on reform of the Sri Lankan electoral system was initiated by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV), People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), Women and Media Collective, and the National Peace Council (NPC). Supported by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID),

*Over 900 individuals representing political parties, civil society, government, and minority and religious groups participated in discussions on recommendations and strategies for electoral reform.*

this dialogue has stimulated discussion and has solicited input from stakeholders across the country on recommendations for electoral reform and strategies for their successful implementation. Stakeholders included politicians, religious leaders, women's groups, business associations, and representatives of various cultural and ethnic groups. In addition to reports from these groups, the dialogue process involved members of the Police Election Secretariat and the Election Commissioner, Mr. Dayananda Dissanyake.

The most recent elections in Sri Lanka have shown a marked decrease in violence and intimidation. While this is an encouraging development, fundamental problems with the electoral system remain that continue to plague the electoral process. This has been recognized by the political parties, many of which have included electoral reform in their election manifestos. The decrease in election violence marks a unique opportunity to implement change by creating an environment conducive to electoral reform. Moreover, as talk of constitutional change returns to the political arena, the issue of electoral reform takes on new immediacy. The time is ripe to discuss and act on the reforms that will improve the electoral process and advance democracy in Sri Lanka.

Each of the groups that participated in the dialogue on electoral reform speaks with a distinctive voice. Though there are issues on which these groups disagree, there is significant concurrence on major points for reform: steps must be taken to better engage women in the political system; amendments should be made to the system of proportional representation; and the rule of law during elections must be strengthened. Steps should also be taken to encourage internal party democracy which could lead to greater

transparency, more qualified party candidate selection, possible party campaign finance disclosure and less fraudulent practices by political parties or their candidates during elections.

This document is the culmination of a process that has engaged groups and individuals from across the political spectrum and throughout the country. It is also a starting point for further discussion and action.

## **HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND**

For the first 30 years of its existence as an independent nation, Sri Lanka employed an election system based on the first-past-the-post (FPP) model. Under this system, Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected from single-member constituencies by receiving a plurality of the vote, and then acted as representatives of those constituencies in Parliament. While this system is still used in some countries, it has been criticized for leading to governments elected on a small majority, or even a minority, of votes cast nationally, but nevertheless commanding a large majority of the seats in Parliament. FPP systems are also not conducive to minority representation unless electoral districts are defined along communal lines, as candidates often win with the support of the largest sub-section of their constituencies without requiring a majority coalition of voters.

The current proportional representation (PR) electoral system in Sri Lanka was introduced with the new Constitution of 1978. The PR system was first used in the 1989 general election (the first general election held after 1978). Under the current system, the country is divided into electoral districts on the basis of population, and political parties present the electorate with a list of candidates for each district. Each voter casts a vote for a party and indicates his/her preference for candidates on that party list. Individual candidates are therefore elected according to the number of preference votes they have obtained. While this system has improved minority representation, proportional representation has been diluted by a constitutional provision that grants the party with the largest percentage of votes in each district a “bonus” seat. The bonus seats are filled through the district list of each party, and 29 seats are awarded to the parties from their national list according to their proportion of the national vote. The two largest political parties in the country—the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—have recognized the need for electoral reform, including proposals for such reform in their election manifestos as early as 1994. Despite previous civil society-led debates on electoral reform, there has been little agreement among political parties about how to reform the electoral system.

There have been significant changes in the electoral system since 1978 as the result of other changes in government structures and the Constitution. Notably, the cut-off point for parties within the proportional representation system was modified by the Fourteenth Amendment and finally set at five percent by the Fifteenth Amendment. Also, the Provincial Councils Elections Act of 1988 instituted a system of proportional

representation for the Provincial Councils, which had been created by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Accordingly, while the current electoral system in Sri Lanka is largely a creation of the 1978 Constitution, it has been modified and extended by subsequent amendments and legislation. Though changes to the parliamentary electoral system will likely require Constitutional amendments, some change can also be brought about by modification of existing legislation without recourse to amending the Constitution.

## **CONSULTATION PROCESS**

### *Recommendations for Reform*

Over 200 individuals participated directly in the initial dialogue process on recommendations for electoral reform, and more than 600 individuals joined in consultations on strategies for implementing these recommendations. The initial dialogues on recommendations for reform were convened by PAFFREL, the Women and Media Collective, and the NPC throughout the month of May 2004. PAFFREL held four sessions with professionals in Galle, religious leaders in Chilaw, local politicians in Kandy, and with civil society organizations and members of the business community in Colombo. The Women and Media Collective conducted its dialogue in May 2004, hosting women representatives from organizations throughout the country and drawing upon its previous submissions to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms in October, 2003. The NPC also convened a forum among members of the Indian Tamil Community in Colombo. Each of these three groups presented their reports at a well-attended final national conference, which took place in Colombo on May 30, 2004, organized by CPA and CMEV.

In addition to the presentations from representatives of the roundtable discussions, the conference featured remarks from the Election Commissioner, Mr. Dayananda Dissanyake, and from the Police Election Secretariat, delivered by DIG Gamini Navaratne. Further, preliminary rural public polling data from the MARGA Institute on the prospect of electoral reform was presented. The Confederation of Public Service Independent Trade Unions (COPSITU), the union which represents public servants, also submitted a report based on their survey of election officials. These varied threads of opinion were tied together by guest speakers and a panel discussion that focused on comparative electoral systems and developing common areas for change.

Each of the groups which reported back to the conference on May 30 issued a series of recommendations for electoral reform. From the dialogue process, 13 concrete recommendations were proposed for action, and four discussion areas were identified for further consultation and consideration (for more detail, see “Recommendations” section below).



### *Strategies for Implementing Reform*

Based on the recommendations generated by the roundtable discussions during the first phase of the program, it was determined that a further series of consultations with stakeholders should be undertaken to explore strategies to bring about reform, and to urge relevant authorities to implement the recommendations generated during the initial roundtables.

In response to the calls for further discussion, PAFFREL launched a series of consultations on strategies for electoral reform in September through November 2004 with diverse sectors of society, including members of the clergy, politicians, serving and retired public servants, teachers, active members of civil society organizations and community leaders. Twelve roundtables were held at the district level and four were held at the provincial level<sup>1</sup>; a culminating national convention was held in Colombo on November 14, 2004.

The 502 participants for the consultations at the District level and 161 participants at the Provincial level were selected with the assistance of the collaborating organizations, all of which are part of the network used by PAFFREL to implement its programmes at the local level. The national convention was attended by 148 participants, as well nine politicians, including three ministers and two MPs. The participants included representatives of Colombo-based civil society organizations, representatives of the business community and some participants from the provincial and district level consultations.

In this series of consultations, participants reviewed the following issues: (a) the role of a constitution in a state; (b) the rationale for electoral reforms; (c) the anticipated effect of such reforms; (d) the process of implementing electoral reforms; and (e) the role of private citizens and civil society organizations in electoral reform. With this background, participants broke into small group discussions to consider action strategies to ensure the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this report.

The MARGA Institute organized a roundtable discussion in Colombo on December 15, 2004 with leading citizens participating to further explore citizen action plans to push the electoral reform agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Participating organizations at the District level included the National Ethnic Unity Foundation in Ampara; the Human Rights Foundation in Moneragala; Sarvodaya in Hambantota; Citizens' Committee for Protecting Human Rights in Matara; Front for Protection of Human and Democratic Rights in Ratnapura; Centre for Human Development in Kegalle; Samadeepa Samaja Kendraya in Anuradhapura; SEVO Foundation in Batticaloa; Uva Agricultural Development Foundation in Badulla; Human Rights Organization in Kurunegala; Sarvodaya in Polonnaruwa; and the Chavakachcheri Chamber of Commerce in Jaffna. Consultations at the provincial level were conducted by United Schools Organization, Matale (Central Province); Sarvodaya, Vavuniya (Northern Province); Human Rights Organization, Galle (Southern Province); PAFFREL, Colombo (Western Province).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM**

Each of the groups which reported back to the conference on May 30 issued a series of suggestions for electoral reform. From the dialogue process, 13 concrete recommendations were proposed for action, and four discussion areas were identified for further consultation and consideration.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM**

1. Ensure that at least 30 percent of elected positions are filled by women.
2. Introduce legislation to bar candidates who have been defeated in the election from becoming Members of Parliament through national list appointments.
3. Authorize the Election Commissioner or Election Commission to censure candidates who have violated election rules, including the power to annul candidacies.
4. Require candidates to declare their assets before elections begin.
5. Require candidates and political parties to keep track of and account for campaign expenditures, either to the public or to an independent auditor.
6. Place limits on election spending by candidates and by parties.
7. Assign print and electronic media (public and private) oversight to the Election Commission or a competent authority appointed by the Commission at the outset of each election campaign to ensure neutrality.
8. Create a mechanism to allow voters to recall representatives who have disregarded norms of good governance or violated Sri Lankan law.
9. Adopt regular, set dates for elections to prevent manipulation of election dates for political purposes.
10. Ensure that current laws regarding candidates with criminal records are enforced, and that they are seen to be enforced by the public.
11. Ensure that constituency or voting area boundaries do not negatively affect minority populations (such as by splitting minorities into two groups for purposes of voting, etc.).
12. Improve postal voting and advance polling procedures to ensure that citizens living abroad or those incapable of reaching the polls on Election Day are not prevented from voting.
13. Constitute the Election Commission as per the Seventeenth Amendment.

### **ISSUES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

1. Obtain a serious commitment by government actors to discuss and then implement a mixed proportional representation (PR) and first past the post (FPP) electoral system. This system must allow constituency representation while ensuring that seats in parliament are apportioned according to the popular vote. Particular issues for discussion include: whether a candidates' list should be open or closed; how to deal with regional parties and independent candidates; and which levels of government this system should apply to (i.e. national elections, provincial elections, local elections, etc.).
2. Examine ways of inducing parties to encourage women to run as candidates, and to provide financial resources and other support to back that encouragement.
3. Discuss the organization of a national effort to facilitate the distribution of National Identity Cards to all eligible citizens.
4. Explore prospects for constitutional change, including divestment of executive power from a single office and the creation of a bicameral legislative structure.

Although each group deliberated independently, and although there was some disagreement about particular proposals, the aforementioned recommendations represent the culmination of this deliberative process, and reflect the broad consensus for change that was expressed both in the roundtable discussions and at the national conference. The recommendations have been grouped by area of relevance: electoral system, parties and candidates, women and under-represented groups, voting and elections, media, and constitutional reform. Some of these recommendations are precise proposals ready to be implemented, and others are recommendations for further discussion. Both concrete proposals and areas for discussion are described in further detail below.

### *Electoral System*

Direct change to the system of polling and representation lies at the heart of electoral reform. Every presentation at the conference suggested some type of change to this system. **A mixed system, comprising proportional representation (PR) and first-past-the-post (FPP) voting has been suggested before in Sri Lanka; this recommendation received widespread endorsement from the roundtable discussion participants.** Combining the two

*“A mixed system, comprising proportional representation (PR) and first-past-the-post (FPP) voting . . . would establish an electoral system that is more representative of the popular will.”*

systems would establish an electoral system that is more representative of the popular will, ensuring that elected representatives are responsible for and responsive to concerns in their geographic constituencies. Mixed systems have been successful in other parts of the world, and seem to present a “best of both worlds” option. The German electoral system in particular is often cited as a successful model of electoral design. The German model provides voters with two votes on polling day: one which is cast for a candidate in a local constituency, the other which is cast for a national party. The national aggregate of party votes determines the proportion of seats allotted to parties in the legislature, while votes within a constituency elect candidates on a FPP system. Once all constituencies are decided, extra seats are allocated among parties commensurate with their apportionment under the national vote. This ensures that some candidates are linked to their geographic constituency, while also ensuring that parties are awarded seats in accordance with their level of popular support.

Despite this system’s many advantages, it is not a panacea. Any real reform must begin by moving beyond general agreement about the benefits of a mixed system, and must critically examine how such a system can be best tailored for Sri Lanka. The balance between PR and FPP is a delicate one, which cannot be found by uninformed mimicry of foreign systems. **A discussion among committed government actors and members of the public and civil society is required to decide how best to design a mixed system for Sri Lanka. Should local elections use a FPP system exclusively? Should Sri Lanka implement a “topping-up” system or some other model? Should national lists be open or closed? These questions must be answered before reform is implemented.**

The question of how the national list should be used is significant in its own right. **The practice of adding nominees who had previously been rejected by the electorate was strongly criticized by the roundtable discussion groups.** Whether this issue is best addressed by specifically discouraging this practice while maintaining a closed national list, or whether an open list should be adopted for elections, is an important issue for discussion. The dominant concern is to end subversion of the expressed will of the electorate through national list nominees.

Though the will of the public can be undermined overtly through abuse of the national list, the threat from more subtle manipulation such as intimidation and the violation of election laws is no less significant. In such cases, providing the electorate with a means of chastening specific elected representatives may be an appropriate pathway to discourage misconduct. **Both the NPC and PAFFREL reports encouraged adoption of a mechanism for citizens to recall elected officials who have disregarded norms of good governance or violated Sri Lankan law.**

Finally, regularity of elections can play an important role in nurturing effective democracy by preventing manipulation of election dates by those holding political power. While prescribed election dates are not universal, they have been used in many countries, such as the United States, as a central part of the electoral system. **During the dialogues, there was considerable support for adoption of set election dates, to provide greater predictability in the electoral system.** The mechanics of how this would work remain to be discussed, but throughout the consultations there was a general belief that the present government system could accommodate predetermined election dates.

### *Parties and Candidates*

If an electoral system lies at the heart of a democracy, candidates and political parties are its lifeblood. Public confidence in the legitimacy of candidates and political parties breeds faith and engagement in the political system. The absence of such confidence can threaten and undermine the entire system.

With this in mind, **dialogue participants widely endorsed giving the Election Commissioner power to sanction or annul candidacies which had violated electoral laws.** The Election Commissioner supported this proposal in his own remarks made at the National Convention organized by CMEV and CPA, noting that such powers might help reduce incidents of violence at polling stations. Many participants at the roundtables advocated

*“Giving the Election Commissioner power to sanction or annul candidacies which had violated electoral laws . . . might help reduce incidents of violence at polling stations.”*

barring candidates with criminal records, and ensuring that present laws relating to criminal history are well understood. **Though criminal records or recent convictions can prevent individuals from standing for election based on existing laws, it is essential that such laws are enforced, and that the public is aware that such laws are enforced.**

Improved transparency within parties will further encourage public confidence in the political system. Access to information about electoral funding and spending would increase parties' accountability to the public. Three suggestions in particular were developed in the roundtable discussions: **1) require candidates to declare their assets before the campaign period begins, 2) require candidates and parties to declare their campaign expenses, and 3) place limits on election spending.** Whether this information should be made available to the public or submitted to an independent election monitor is a matter for further discussion. The need for that discussion, however, is crucial.

### *Women and Other Under-Represented Groups*

One of the most serious problems in contemporary Sri Lankan politics is the shortage of women engaged in the political system. Though 52 percent of the population is female, the percentage of women in political office remains at 1.9 percent of all local and national government offices. The failure to encourage fair access to the electoral system breeds further alienation and disengagement among the electorate. Such failure transcends the structure of the voting system and the conduct of political parties, but it is certainly influenced by both.

*"The failure to encourage fair access to the electoral system breeds further alienation and disengagement among the electorate."*

To address this dilemma, participants in the roundtable organized by the Women and Media Collective advocated for **regulations to ensure at least 30 percent female representation in elected office.** This level has been identified by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women as a basic requirement to encourage gender parity. **Further, real steps to encourage women to participate in politics at a party level (such as increased training, education, or funding for women candidates) are required to ensure that women are able to seek elected office.** The cabinet recently adopted unanimously a recommendation that 33 percent of candidates for provincial and local elected offices must be women. This issue has been lobbied for and recommendations presented through this project to local and national political leaders.

The absence of minority voices in the political system should also be cause for concern. While there are no simple solutions, any improvement will require broader trust and interest in the system by minorities engendered by many positive steps and progressive reinforcement. **As a starting point, program participants suggested ensuring that electoral districts take into account the natural contours of local populations and discourage diminution of minority political voices.**

### *Voting and Elections*

Many observers and participants in the April parliamentary election, including the Election Commissioner, COPSITU, and the Women and Media Collective, catalogued

problems with the system of postal voting, which effectively disenfranchised segments of the population. **The process of postal voting must be improved to ensure that Sri Lankans living and working abroad can nevertheless have a say in political decisions at home. Further, voting procedures for those who cannot take time off work on Election Day must be critically evaluated to ensure that individuals in those situations are not prevented from voting.**

The establishment of national identity cards has been a topic of discussion in Sri Lanka for many years; reports from the roundtables and consultations confirmed that there is still considerable interest in the issue as a potential solution to problems of voter fraud and irregularities in voter registration. A bill was passed by Parliament in September 2004 making it mandatory to hold a national identity card in order to vote in future elections. This project has successfully lobbied politicians and raised public awareness through the media and consultations on this issue. The challenge remains to ensure that every eligible citizen can obtain a national identity card.

*“A bill was passed by Parliament in September 2004 making it mandatory to hold a national identity card in order to vote in future elections. . . . The challenge remains to ensure that every eligible citizen can obtain a national identity card.”*

### *Media*

The ability of the public to access information during elections is an essential component of modern democratic systems. As providers of objective, non-partisan information, the media can play a vital role in elections and democracy; where media outlets present biased information, this role may be threatened. **Several roundtable discussions endorsed assigning a stronger media oversight role to the Election Commission or another relevant authority at the outset of all campaigns.** This would build upon provisions in the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, which empowers the Election Commissioner to appoint a competent authority in respect to the State controlled Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation only, and recent court cases which interpret those provisions. This proposal should be evaluated within the context of those cases and the Seventeenth Amendment to determine whether it can be implemented under the current constitutional structure, or whether it must be accomplished through constitutional change.

### *Constitutional Reform*

Finally, it is evident that an electoral system cannot be divorced from the constitutional structure which outlines the political system. Though not a focus of the roundtable discussions, many groups nevertheless indicated support for a **reduction in the power of the executive branch and divestment of that power from a single office. Also, the creation of a bicameral legislature was endorsed as a means of protecting regional and minority interests within the democratic system.**



**Participants at the Dialogue of Religious Leaders**



**Participants at the Dialogue of Professionals**





**The Minister for Energy Hon. Susil Premjayanth addressing the National Convention on Electoral Law Reform: Strategies for Action, November 2004**



**The Deputy Leader of the United National Party Hon. Karu Jayasuriya and Mr. Kingsley Rodrigo, Chairman of PAFREL at the National Convention on Electoral Law Reform: Strategies for Action, November 2004**



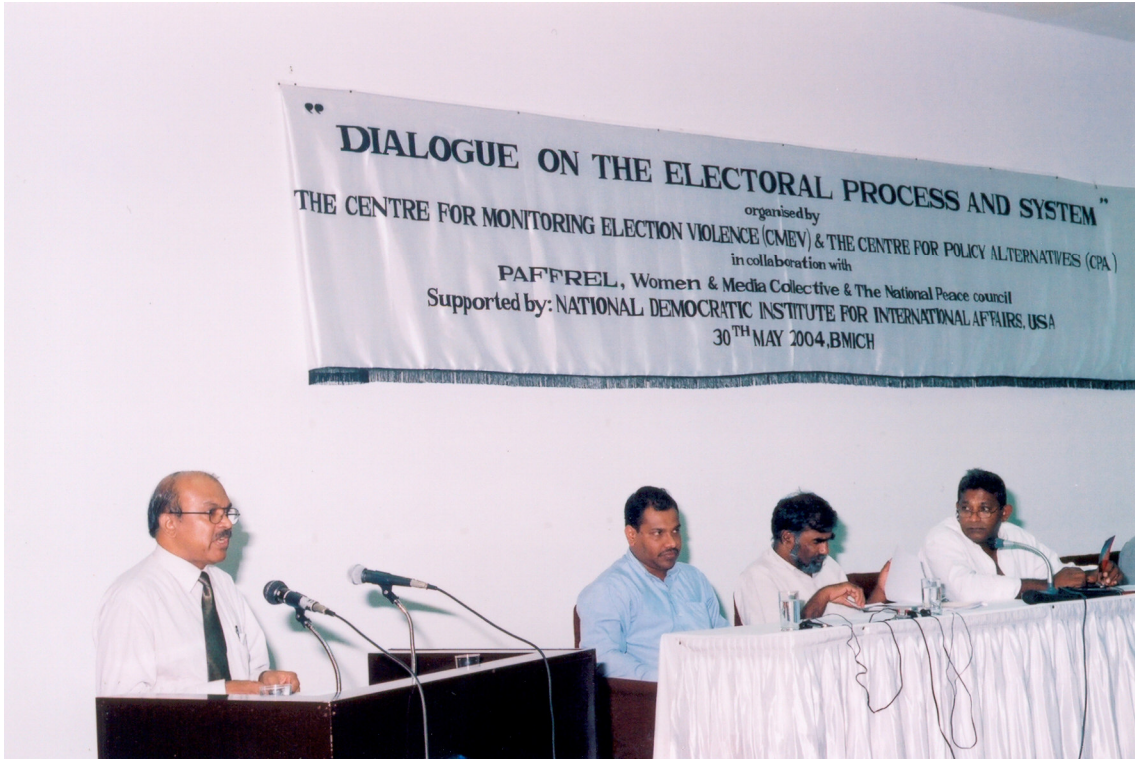


**Participants at the final Dialogue on the Electoral Process and System, May 2004**



**Participants at a District level Dialogue**





**The Election Commissioner Mr. Dayananda Dissanayake addressing the final Dialogue on the Electoral Process and System, May 2004**



**Panelists at the final Dialogue on the Electoral Process and System, May 2004. Ms. Sunila Abeysekera, Co-Convenor CMEV and the Women and Media Collective, is in the Chair**

## **ACTION STRATEGIES**

With these recommendations articulated, PAFFREL held a series of public dialogues on possible strategies to implement these reform measures. During these discussions—held from September to November 2004—a wide variety of public actions were suggested by participants and consequently undertaken to create broad public pressure for electoral reforms. A strong countrywide awareness campaign was implemented on the need for electoral reform and for action to be taken by political leadership. Participants undertook the following actions to reform the electoral process:

- **Postcard campaign:** At the conclusion of each of the consultations, the moderators suggested to the participants that, if they were serious about the need for electoral reforms, each could indicate on postcards the reform that he/she considered most important and send them to the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition. This was done by every participant in the series of consultations; the postcards were provided by PAFFREL.
- **Signature campaign:** Participants were encouraged to contribute to an upcoming petition campaign to be sent to the President, parliamentarians and party secretaries through PAFFREL’s district coordinators after the conclusion of the national convention. Participants assured their cooperation in the campaign and the participating groups committed to circulating the petitions.
- **Delegations:** Three delegations organized by the participants in the provincial-level consultations met prominent parliamentarians in the respective provinces and submitted memoranda outlining the reforms that have been recommended in this programme. Meetings took place in the Northern Province in Vavuniya on October 11, in the Southern Province in Galle on November 11, and in the Western Province in Gampaha on November 12. The memoranda also contained a brief description of the consultation programme and a request that appropriate action be taken within their political parties and in parliament to ensure that the proposals are implemented. Each delegation consisted of between 20 and 30 individuals who had participated in the consultations. At the presentation of the memoranda, the respective parliamentarians assured that they would take up the proposals with their political parties at the first available opportunity.
- **Radio Programming:** Between September and November, eight discussions on the popular “Subharathi” programme of “S.L.B.C.,” a government radio channel, were conducted on the topic of electoral reform. Depending on the topic, these one-hour programmes featured senior politicians, senior public officials, members of the clergy, senior police officials and key activists in civil society organizations. Phone-in facilities were provided for public question and answer sessions.

- **Television Programming:** Two thirty-minute televised discussions were conducted on the Independent Television Network of the government. Discussion topics included: (a) legislation to make the national identity card compulsory for casting a ballot; and (b) the general subject of electoral reforms, including women representation. The discussions were conducted on October 12 and 19, 2004.
- **Advocacy Advertising:** Four advocacy advertisements on electoral reforms were published in the Nidahas and Meepura monthly newspapers from September to November, 2004.

- **Questionnaire:** In response to a questionnaire regarding their future engagement in the campaign for electoral reform, participants indicated a strong willingness to continue working for this cause.

Mode of Contribution	No. Willing to Contribute
Participants in advocacy groups	234
Contributing funds	85
Mobilizing others	221
Raising awareness of the programme	235

They indicated that they would make a contribution by: participating in advocacy groups; contributing funds for activities; mobilizing others to join the campaign; and making others aware of the programme. Of the total of 663 participants in the 12 District-level and four Provincial-level consultations, 423, (64 percent), stated that they would participate in such a programme of action and indicated at least one of the above modes of contribution; many of the participants indicated more than one mode.

### *Future Campaign Strategies*

In addition to the initiatives begun through the consultations, participants developed numerous strategies for future efforts to advance electoral reform. A large majority of participants agreed that public pressure was essential to ensure implementation of electoral reforms. Participants were in favor of launching a broad-based campaign to generate greater public discussion of the issues involved and to mobilize public opinion. The following suggestions for implementing a country-wide awareness campaign were put forth:

1. Local politicians from all parties should be engaged in advocacy for reform. On the heels of each awareness programme, civil society groups in the locality should organize and hold discussions with local politicians from across the political spectrum on the need for electoral reform. At these discussions a wide variety of citizen groups should be represented, including local members of the clergy, professionals, community leaders and senior citizens.
2. Forming hand-holding “human chains” should be undertaken first locally, then sub-nationally and nationally to demonstrate the desire for electoral reforms. This recommendation is based on the successful public campaigns organized in 2001 to create pressure for a ceasefire between the government and the LTTE.

3. A highly publicized signature campaign (petitions) should be undertaken at the local level. After collection of signatures copies should be carried in peaceful processions to local politicians of all the political parties. Copies should also be sent to party leaders in Colombo, parliamentarians and the President.
4. Articles on electoral reforms by a set of three academics should be published in the three languages in three national newspapers each week during the campaign.
5. A campaign of posters, handbills and advocacy advertising should be undertaken.
6. Programming in the electronic media through discussions and press conferences should be conducted modeled on previous television and radio campaigns addressing electoral reform.

Participants expressed the view that many of the civil society organizations in the provinces did not have the capacity to handle certain aspects of the activities recommended. Therefore, participants felt that the well-established, national-level civil society organizations which possess the necessary capacity and expertise should mobilize and provide the necessary funds, make available resource persons, and other requirements such as printed material for the organizations in the districts to implement the programme. Activities such as those connected with the media should also be coordinated by the organizations located in and around the capital.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report highlights the most prominent recommendations from the dialogues on electoral reform. Although the groups differed to some extent on the recommendations, all agreed upon the need for reform, and there was broad support for the proposals enumerated in this report. At the very least, the topics identified here must be addressed in any future discussion of electoral reform.

Rapid steps should be undertaken to ensure that the plans for reform generated through these roundtables receive further substantive discussion and implementation. Campaign activities to pursue reform issues should include the involvement of local politicians in advocacy efforts, highly publicized petition campaigns, circulation of informative materials, media discussions, and citizen demonstrations. A concerted, broad-based advocacy campaign will keep electoral issues at the forefront of the public agenda until reforms are implemented.

This report does not answer the question of how to develop a fair electoral system; rather, it provides some key suggestions for change as well as action strategies for pursuing further implementation. The next step toward electoral reform must be undertaken by all those who have a stake in democracy—by definition, the entire Sri Lankan citizenry. The Sri Lankan public has demonstrated a strong commitment to remain engaged on this issue. We hope that the dialogue on which this report is based will not only serve as a template but also as a catalyst for an effective citizen-driven campaign for electoral reform.