



1st November 2024

Centre for Policy Alternatives (Guarantee) Limited
6/5, Layards Road,
Colombo 5,
Sri Lanka.

President Anura Kumara Disanayaka,
Presidential Secretariat, Galle Face,
Colombo 1,
Sri Lanka.

Your Excellency,

Sri Lanka has witnessed a busy few weeks since the Presidential election held in September 2024 and in the lead up to the parliamentary election to be held in November. Amidst developments on a range of issues, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) writes this letter to urge immediate action with key promises contained in your election manifesto. In a context where Sri Lanka continues to experience multiple challenges and is moving towards recovery from a debilitating economic crisis and cycles of violence, we wish to draw your attention to critical issues that require immediate attention.

The 2022 Aragalaya underscored the **urgent need for governance reforms, demanding action against corruption and the lack of accountability** that have eroded public trust. In this context, CPA and others have highlighted the critical need for governance reforms to address executive overreach, politicised institutions and the culture of impunity in Sri Lanka. In this regard, we recognise the commitment you voiced in your campaign to bring about meaningful governance reforms, to combat the culture of corruption in the country and to bring about accountability including the **abolishing of the executive presidency**.

Further, recent events yet again remind of Sri Lanka's experiences with violence and fragile peace. The failure of successive governments to **address the root causes of the conflict** has deepened societal divisions, heightened surveillance with the potential to exacerbate existing conflicts and trigger new tensions. This is also at a time when the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was reportedly used in October 2024, raising concerns of a key pledge you made to **repeal oppressive laws including the PTA**.

Amidst increasing challenges, it is critical you revisit the promises made in your manifesto and initiate a process of reforms in a transparent and inclusive manner. We note that many of these changes would require legislative action, which can only be taken up after the new Parliament has convened, however we urge that the government reaffirm its commitment to the promises made and take the necessary preparatory action which would allow the new Parliament to move ahead with these reforms without delay.

1. Governance and Accountability

- **Independent Institutions:** It is essential to place adequate checks and balances on executive power and ensure that independent regulatory bodies are free from political interference. Abolishing the Executive Presidency and having effective oversight mechanisms are critical steps in this direction.
- **Strengthening Anti-Corruption Measures:** Strengthening and full enforcement of anti-corruption laws and policies is essential. We urge the establishment of an independent public prosecutor's office and clear accountability mechanisms for corruption-related offenses. We also urge the necessary allocation of funds to be made to the existing institutions to investigate cases of bribery and corruption and to initiate prosecutions. We would discourage initiatives to set up ad hoc initiatives to deal with these cases as such mechanisms have proven to be unsuccessful in the past.
- **Emblematic Cases:** Ensuring transparent investigations and accountability in high-profile cases remains critical to restoring public trust. This includes expediting investigations into cases such as the Easter Sunday Attacks and several other emblematic cases.

2. Constitutional Reform and Law-Making Process

- **Abolishing the Executive Presidency:** There has long been a call for the abolition of the Executive Presidency, and your election to the office of President came with a commitment to be Sri Lanka's final Executive President. We urge you to provide political leadership and initiate reforms in this regard.
- **Law-Making Process:** We emphasise the importance of consultative, multi-partisan, and transparent processes in law-making, incorporating local expertise and public consultations. We urge that suitable amendments are made to standing orders in this regard.
- **Full implementation of the 13th Amendment:** Implementing the 13th Amendment is the first step to indicate a commitment to addressing the national question and the decades long grievances of minorities in Sri Lanka. We note that implementing the existing constitutional provisions is an essential prerequisite to enhance confidence of ethnic and religious minorities and would reaffirm your commitment to your oath of office.
- **Legal Reform:** We call for reforms to ensure that proposed laws comply with human rights standards, safeguarding against misuse that disproportionately impacts minorities. We particularly call for the repeal of the PTA and the Online Safety Act 2024. Proposed reforms such as the Anti-Terrorism Bill and the Non-Governmental Organisation Bill should be revisited, with meaningful and broad-based public consultations.

3. Reconciliation

- **Reckoning for Past Violence:** There needs to be a genuine effort at addressing the demands of victims from across Sri Lanka in their search for justice and truth. This should include initiating independent processes at accountability and truth telling with the objective of addressing the entrenched culture of impunity.
- **Land Rights:** Immediate steps should be taken to halt land appropriation and return land to the rightful owners. Political leadership is also required in a comprehensive reparations programme that addresses restitution.
- **Demilitarisation:** Reducing the military presence in the North and East and releasing lands held by the military coupled with security sector reforms will support reconciliation efforts. Steps should also be taken to disengage the military from civilian activities in relation to commercial activities and governance.

4. Structural Inequalities

- **Addressing Socio-Economic Rights:** Access to basic amenities, including health, education, sanitation and potable water, remains limited in certain regions. Providing the necessary resources and a commitment to expanding infrastructure in these areas will be instrumental in promoting education, public health, well-being, and overall quality of life.
- **Equitable Assistance Schemes:** Concerns have been raised with the distribution of funds through government initiatives including the Aswesuma and Samurdhi schemes. Addressing these gaps in welfare schemes is essential to ensure that those in need can obtain support and start a process of addressing inequalities.
- **Address the Debt Burden of Women and Vulnerable Groups:** Many women and marginalised communities, including the Malaiyaha community and indigenous groups remain disproportionately affected by debt, which restricts economic mobility and entrenches cycles of poverty. We advocate for targeted interventions and sustainable financial support mechanisms to relieve this burden and promote economic resilience among these groups.
- **Promote Sustainable Livelihoods and Stable Employment:** Sustainable livelihoods and secure employment opportunities are essential to achieving long-term economic recovery. We encourage the creation of policies and programmes aimed at promoting stable employment, skill development, and access to sustainable economic opportunities across all communities.

We urge you to initiate the necessary action on the above areas without further delay and look forward to engaging in the furtherance of progressive reforms in Sri Lanka.

Thank you.