

*Sunday 22, 2013*



The Tamil people have once again stated loud and clear their desire to determine their own future by voting for the Tamil National Alliance in overwhelming numbers in the Northern Provincial Council Election. British Tamils Forum calls on the international community to take heed of the message delivered by the voters of the Northern Province; the Tamil national question and Sri Lanka's perpetual human rights crisis will only ever be resolved by giving the Tamil people the chance to decide for themselves how, and by whom, they wish to be governed.

It is widely agreed that the Northern Provincial Council (NPC) will be a largely ineffectual body, with negligible executive power. Furthermore, in the past few months the Sri Lankan government has openly stated its intention to even further limit the power of the council by stripping it of land and police powers.

Nevertheless, the NPC election has been of significance for one reason only. Following the atrocities of 2009, the Tamil population of the Northern Province had been given a historic opportunity to either:

- a) Reaffirm their desire for self-determination – first expressed through the Vaddukkoddai Resolution, mandated in 1977 – by voting for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA); or
- b) Give up on this desire, by showing support for Sri Lanka's ruling, Sinhala-dominated United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA).

With the TNA winning 30 out of 38 council seats, there can be little doubt which option the Tamil people have chosen.

The Tamil people's overwhelming support for Tamil rule in the election is made all the more

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remarkable by the widespread violence, intimidation and misinformation they faced in the run-up to and on the day of the election. Examples include:

\*The murder of a TNA activist;

\*The disruption of TNA campaign meetings and threatening attendees;

\*An attack on the home of a TNA candidate and assault of an election monitor who came to investigate;

Intimidation by unidentified gangs who roamed Tamil villages, defacing TNA posters and daubing pro-UPFA graffiti, in an effort to dissuade Tamil villagers from voting;

\*The publication of counterfeit newspapers to spread misinformation about a Tamil candidate.

In addition, the Sri Lankan government unashamedly tried to bribe the votes of Tamil people in the final weeks of the election campaign by promising all manner of infrastructure and “development” projects for the region.

That Sri Lanka’s ruling alliance received such a drubbing in the election – despite the threats and bribes it offered the Tamil people – is testament to the courage and overwhelming conviction of the Tamil people. Furthermore, the shocking reports of intimidation during this election – often in full view of election monitors and the media – should serve as a reminder to the global Tamil community that it is their duty to speak up and tell the world about the injustices and persecution faced by their kin in the island of Sri Lanka.

The international community has long been reluctant to recognise the Tamil people’s desire for self-determination. Instead, international actors have largely insisted on framing all the atrocities and violations that have been perpetrated by the Sri Lankan state squarely within the framework of human rights and good governance. The Tamil people’s longstanding charge that they face genocide by the Sri Lankan state is wishfully dismissed as exaggeration.

However, following these election results, the international community must finally listen to the opinion of the vast majority of Tamil people. The decades of violence and persecution they have faced is genocide, and the Tamil people really do want to choose how they govern themselves.

Furthermore, angered by its election defeat, the Sri Lankan government is likely to further intensify its campaign of persecution against the Tamil people – whether it be sexual and

## **British Tamils Forum Statement: Tamils vote overwhelmingly for self-determination in the NPC election**

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physical violence against Tamil civilians, the theft of Tamil lands, or the deprivation of Tamil livelihoods. The Tamil people need protection from these genocidal acts – and all those responsible for previous acts of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity must be brought to account through an independent, international investigation.

Given the increasingly perilous position of the Tamil people in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, it is more important than ever that the international community works with the Tamil people, and the Tamil-mandated TNA, to safeguard their human, political and cultural rights – including their right to self-determination – and to protect them from the genocide perpetrated by the Sri Lankan state. British Tamils Forum stands shoulder to shoulder with any individual or organisation that works towards these aims.

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