



Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL Foundation)

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For Immediate Release:

ANFREL Notes Continued Improvement of Sri Lanka's Electoral System

COLOMBO, 19 August – The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) today expresses its enthusiastic congratulations to the people of Sri Lanka for their role in the country's 17 August Parliamentary Elections. ANFREL's sixteen observers were drawn from its network of Asian Citizen Election Observation Organizations and they observed 115 Polling Stations in six of the nine provinces in the country. Being careful to get a representative sample of Sri Lanka's diversity in their observation across the country, we found that voters' active participation in the Election, as typified by the high voter turnout, has helped deliver the relatively smooth and peaceful Pre-election and Election Day periods that ANFREL observed.

ANFREL wishes to further compliment the Election Department of Sri Lanka for their vital leadership. The Election Department's professionalism and impartiality were praised by stakeholders across the political spectrum. Indeed, their engaged and pro-active management of the Electoral Process, including their engaged presence in the campaign period, was deservedly hailed by ANFREL's interviewees. The Department's performance instilled in the public much needed trust in the fairness of the election and for that they deserve the plaudits they have been receiving.

The Sri Lanka Police Service's contributions to ensure a largely peaceful election environment and ably enforce existing election regulations is also worth noting. After declaring that they were now more empowered and freer to perform their duties, the Police rewarded this newfound trust by helping to deliver an Election and campaign Environment which was more in line with the Election Laws of Sri Lanka and more conducive for Elections more generally. While all violence is unacceptable and there remains work to be done on the issue, ANFREL is encouraged by the positive trend lines in Sri Lanka, aided by the Police, that show the country moving away from Electoral Violence.

ANFREL's Chairman Mr. Damaso Magbual added that, "ANFREL hopes that Sri Lanka can build upon the democratic momentum coming out of this election to create a stronger, more representative democratic system with elections that fully reflect the will of the people. With the right follow-up and an inclusive process of Electoral Reform and Reconciliation, ANFREL believes that the future is bright for Sri Lankan Electoral Democracy."

The process of reform will hopefully also include an assessment of the Electoral law and the Electoral system, especially their capacity to deliver a level-playing field for the country, healthy

Afghanistan – FEFA; *Bangladesh* – FEMA, ODHAKAR; *Cambodia* - COMFREL, NICFEC; *East Timor* - Women Caucus; *Indonesia* - KIPP, JPPR, Perludem; *India* – Lokniti, *Japan* – InterBand; *Mongolia* - Women for Social Progress (WSP); *Nepal* - NEOC, NEMA; *Pakistan* – FAFEN; *Philippines* - IPER, PPCRV, NAMFREL; *Singapore* – Maruah; *South Korea* – PSPD; *Sri Lanka* – PAFFREL; *Taiwan* – CCW; *Thailand* - PollWatch



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political parties, and candidates and representatives that truly work for their voters. It was relayed to ANFREL in numerous interviews that the current system, when combined with a lack of campaign finance limits and significant restrictions on the types of campaigning allowed, tilts towards candidates with greater financial resources. With that in mind, Mr. Magbual expressed ANFREL's long-held principle that, "while a country's electoral system design is of course its own choice, we hope that any process of amendment and reform is an inclusive one that reflects the values and voices of all the country's people."

Finally, ANFREL applauds the role played by Civil Society and the vast majority of Political Parties and candidates. By supporting the process through civic and voter education efforts such as the March 12th Movement, Civil Society in Sri Lanka has set a wonderful example for their colleagues in the region. Similarly, parties and candidates that endeavored to play by the rules of the game should be applauded here and emulated elsewhere.

It is because of these groups and the contributions of those mentioned above that ANFREL believes that Monday's Election will serve as a benchmark going forward for peaceful, orderly political transitions in the country and looks forward to supporting Sri Lanka's continuing democratic growth.

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