

## Sri Lanka: The Government must Herald Reforms on Accountability, Justice and Human Rights

### For Immediate Release

(Bangkok, 20 January 2015) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), welcomed the successful conclusion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Presidential elections in Sri Lanka. The country has seen turmoil for many decades, the last decade in particular being one of the most trying of times. It is hoped that the recent election of President Maithripala Sirisena will lead to change and reform in this unfortunate cycle.

For such change to happen FORUM-ASIA believes it is imperative for the new President to take immediate steps to restore fundamental freedoms and end the impunity that has plagued Sri Lanka for so long. This can be achieved only by ensuring that truth, justice and accountability are established through credible investigations into allegations of human rights and humanitarian law violations committed prior to and after the brutal end of Sri Lanka's civil war.

*"The new administration in Sri Lanka must immediately embark on speedy demilitarisation in the North and East of the country and enable the peoples of these areas to fully enjoy their civil liberties without restrictions",* said Evelyn Balais-Serrano, the Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA

Henri P. Tiphagne, the Chairperson of FORUM-ASIA further called upon the new President to *"ensure equal freedoms and rights for all religious and ethnic groups within Sri Lanka and end threats, violence and unequal treatment towards ethnic Tamils as well as Muslim and Christian religious communities."*

FORUM-ASIA urged the new administration to ensure the independence of national institutions including the judiciary, National Human Rights Commission and the electoral body. Restoring the erstwhile Constitutional Council is an important step in this regard. On priority, legislative reforms must be undertaken for the repeal of repressive laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Ms. Balais-Serrano also stated that *"the President should ensure that freedom of expression is unhindered and press freedoms are respected forthwith as well as the right to freedom of assembly and association and civil society space is protected."*

Mr. Ruki Fernando of INFORM Documentation Center pointed out that *"as a first step in this direction the new President should set up a process for the speedy release of all human rights defenders and political prisoners currently detained and terminate ongoing investigations against them which will then assure that a safe and enabling environment will be guaranteed for those promoting and protecting human rights."*

FORUM-ASIA further calls upon the new President to adopt a fresh approach to international appeals for truth, justice and accountability in the country and fully cooperate with international human rights mechanisms – in particular, with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Right (OHCHR) and the UN Human Rights Council. The President should pro-actively engage with OHCHR's ongoing investigation and fully cooperate in implementing findings by the body, which will soon be presented to the UN Human Rights Council this year.

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**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organizations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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