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Opinion of the Swiss Council of Eelam Tamils on the presidential election in Sri Lanka

The war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009. The final stage of the war alone cost the life of 40,000 Tamil civilians, according to estimates by the United Nations. There is countless evidence of war crimes committed by government forces. Thus, the "no-fire zones" set up by the government during the final stage were bombed targeted by the Sinhalese troops, killing thousands of Tamil civilians. It can be stated with certainty that the army has deliberately attacked civilians. In addition, hospitals were repeatedly bombed, killing injured civilians and medical staff and destroying medical equipment. In addition, there have been countless executions and rape. These are just a few examples of the atrocities committed by the Rajapaksa government. Five years after the official end of the war, there is no independent investigation into war crimes in Sri Lanka. The Rajapaksa government even makes every effort to prevent or watering down the investigation by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which recently was expressed in the refusal of visas for the UN investigators.

The present situation of Tamils in the north and east of the island is desolate. The Tamil area is still under military occupation. An incredible number of Sinhalese soldiers is stationed in the north of the island. The army exercises rigorous control of the Tamil people by repression, surveillance and violence. In addition, it controls the economic development and the civil administration in northern Sri Lanka. Moreover, the Sinhala soldiers commit countless human rights violations: Rape of Tamil women and violence against journalists, protesters and students. The incumbent President Rajapaksa always stresses the supposed economic progress of the North since the end of the war. He makes the economic development even the core point of his campaign in the Tamil areas. The reality however is somewhat different. More Tamils

than ever before are deeply in debt. The property of countless Tamils is taken away from them. The army produces and sells agricultural goods and operates many restaurants and shops in the north, thereby massively increasing the economic pressure for the Tamils. In addition, Sinhalization and therewith ethnic cleansing develops at a fast pace. The State purposefully settles more and more Sinhalese in the north and east, thus making the Tamils a minority in the traditional Tamil areas.

The 13th Constitutional Amendment established the system of Provincial Councils. However, the aim of decentralization of power was not achieved with this system. The Provincial Councils are rather puppets of the central government and are incapacitated. Thus, power is concentrated in the hands of the Governor of the province, who is appointed by the President. The Governor has to approve the bills presented by the Provincial Council, but he can also dissolve the Provincial Council to enforce his interest. The current Governor of the Northern Province is the Sinhalese and former army general G.A. Chandrasiri, who represents only the interests of the Sinhalese and the central government. For these reasons, the system of Provincial Councils is not able to guarantee self-determination to the Tamil people.

Mahinda Rajapaksa is responsible for the death of thousands of Tamil civilians and protects murderers and rapists. In addition, his government does everything possible to limit the powers of the Provincial Councils few even further. Like this the control over the police and land rights, which were designed as powers of the Provincial Councils, continues to be with the central government. Government control over land rights simplifies the Sinhalization of the Tamil areas. In addition, the situation in northern Sri Lanka is worse now than it was throughout the past 30 years. Rajapaksa brought great suffering to the Tamils and there is no relief in sight. A structural genocide becomes apparent which puts the existence of the Tamil people at risk.

Also the opposition candidate Maithiripala Sirisena will continue the Rajapaksa policy against the Tamils if he is elected president. Sirisena has repeatedly stressed in his campaign that he will reject an international investigation into war crimes and protect all parties involved. He also does not endorse a federal form of government and decentralization of power.

The upcoming presidential election is an election for the Sinhala people, and will have no positive impact on the situation of Tamils. The unitary state, the current political culture, the Sinhalese nationalism and the suppression of the Tamil people will continue after the election. It does not matter which candidate is elected president because this election is a choice between two evils. Therefore, the Swiss Council of Eelam Tamils recommends the Tamils in Sri Lanka to give their vote neither of the two candidates and to insert their ballot blank. This is the only possibility for the Tamil people to demonstrate discontent and rejection of the current constitution and system.

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