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NATIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE

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NATIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON “GOTA-GO” CAMPAIGN

Under our Constitution (vide Article 40) when the office of the President falls vacant prior to his term of office by resignation or otherwise, his successor has to be elected by Members of Parliament and the new President will hold office for the remaining period of the office of President. The new President is elected by secret ballot and by absolute majority. Thus, the 113 Members of Parliament may ultimately decide who the new President is to be in place of the President elected by the people. Those who prosecute this campaign should first disclose to the people whom they would bring as the new President of Sri Lanka. The people need to know the policies of the new President and his qualifications.

This campaign started with the slogan that the President and all 225 Members of Parliament should go home but paradoxically now we find this campaign being confined to a ‘Gota-Go’ campaign. Is the new President going to be selected by the very people who needs to be sent home? There’s something terribly wrong with this ongoing campaign. There is obviously a political motive behind this campaign. Even more it is obvious that NGOs are playing a proactive role for a regime change in the same way they did in 2015 with the able assistance of the Government of the US. The food and drinks offered to protesters with sophisticated packing are obviously not from sympathetic supporters but from organized groups showing signs of a foreign hand. We can see that some of the slogans are against the Maha Sangha and the Buddhist public in general.

The National Joint Committee (NJC) accepts that this Government has failed so miserably that the present Cabinet of Ministers can no longer claim any right to govern. The country is economically not in a position to hold elections at this moment. Therefore it is the duty of both the Government and the Opposition to amend the Constitution to find a suitable solution to the present crisis. The NJC supports the proposal made to the Government by two members of the expert panel that have been appointed to draft a new Constitution to put in place an apolitical Cabinet of Ministers as a temporary measure during this crisis. They have proposed to have an interim Cabinet of Ministers consisting of 15 members who are not Members of Parliament with the required expertise in the respective subjects and functions of the relevant Ministries. Once the country is back on track elections can be held and people will get the opportunity to elect suitable people to govern this country with a Cabinet of their choice.

Intellectuals and professionals cannot contest and succeed in getting elected under the present electoral system. Therefore it is necessary that we revert back to the “First Past the Post” system of elections so that independent candidates without the support of political parties could contest elections. It is not possible to get capable people with integrity into Parliament under the proportional representation system where political parties submit lists of candidates decided by their leaders. Therefore, the NJC is strongly of the view that the “First Past the Post” system should be brought in as a matter of priority.

Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa came into power promising to uphold the rule of law and to bring in good governance practices. However soon after he came into power the 20th Amendment was brought to bring in his kith and kin to power. The President’s brother was brought into Parliament through the back door and given the Finance portfolio and his other siblings and nephews were bestowed with Ministries lavishly. Provisions relating to the National Procurement Commission was removed completely. This was to facilitate the disposal of national resources. Soon 40% shares of the Yugadhanavi power plant was sold to the Americans giving them the monopoly to supply natural gas without competitive bidding. Sri Lanka lost millions as a result of this deal. This is a national crime.

Having come to power with the vote of the nationalists they were soon sidelined. Two prominent Ministers were sacked from the Government without any justifiable reason. Therefore there is a serious doubt whether this Government would act in the national interest in the future. It is necessary therefore that before the people extend their support to the present Government a new Constitution be adopted forthwith ensuring that;

- 1) The electoral system is changed to the “First Past the Post” system so that independent professionals could contest the elections without the support of political parties.
- 2) The Article 9 in the present Constitution on Buddhism be retained.
- 3) The unitary character of the State, the National Flag and the National Anthem are not changed.
- 4) The right to use the Sinhala language in the Northern and Eastern provinces be restored.
- 5) The supremacy of Parliament is restored and all subordinate legislation whether enacted by Provincial Councils or any other body is subject to laws enacted by Parliament to ensure the concept of “one country one law”
- 6) All agreements entered into with foreign companies and governments are examined by the Supreme Court before they are entered into and approved by Parliament.
- 7) No procurement by the State be permitted without competitive bidding unless in an extreme emergency.

The NJC can no longer support the Government unless a firm commitment is made to ensure that the promises given to the people prior to the election are fulfilled without any reservation.

Lt Col. Anil Amarasekera (Rtd.)

Mr. K. M. B. Kotakadeniya. Senior DIG.(Rtd)

**Co-Presidents National Joint Committee**

12<sup>th</sup> April 2022