

19 November 2009

My fellow citizens,

Although the deadly conflict that caused so much suffering throughout our country has ended, we may have to live for a while longer with the resultant hardships and political uncertainties. We all want an end to enmity and violence and long for a time when our leaders will work together to give us the progress we have been so long denied.

This letter brings you three messages; to assure you of my continued commitment to that task, and to the ethical and social principles that have always guided me; to let you know of my current plans for the achievement of those goals; and - most importantly - to invite you to join me in carrying out those plans. It is only with your continued support that our efforts can succeed.

Continued commitment to principle.

In 2007, seventeen members of Parliament from the United National Party (UNP), took the critical decision to support the governing UPFA. They did so in order to support President Rajapaksa's effort to bring to an end the 30-year conflict which has been so destructive to our communal, social and economic well being.

I was one of the seventeen; I did not take that decision lightly, but only after a great deal of reflection. Many of you may have been confused to see me move over to the Government benches. I know that some even thought my action merely opportunistic.

As a member of the UNP I supported its efforts, while in Government, to end the conflict through negotiation. It soon became clear that the LTTE leadership did not favour a peaceful settlement through negotiation and compromise, but preferred instead to impose its will by force. My decision to support President Rajapaksa's Government was taken because I came to believe that co-operation with the Government, which was reluctantly compelled to meet force with force, was the only way to end the conflict, and therefore the only way forward for all of us. History and you, our citizens, will judge whether I made the right decision.

It is clear that President Rajapaksa's leadership, coupled with the stability our support provided, enabled our armed forces to achieve a decisive victory over the LTTE. Now, we must restore harmony among our divided communities, heal the wounds of conflict and bring unity to our people.

Anyone who listened to my maiden speech in Parliament in 2000, or who has kept track of my record, or is aware of my political philosophy, should not be surprised by my action. I have consistently urged all political parties to unite to form a government of national unity to end the decades of fraternal strife. Had the talks between the SLFP and the UNP in 2007 succeeded, that result might have been achieved; but the talks failed for no good reason.

To me a "government of national unity" means a government that enables leaders with different political views and programmes to set aside their non-essential differences and unite to achieve a common aim and purpose. Today that means a government dedicated to the relief and advancement of all those who have borne, so patiently, the hardships and anxieties imposed by civil strife. I believe that President Mahinda Rajapaksa's leadership will help our country to realize this objective.

To reach our nation's full potential.

- In this endeavour, I believe, all of us have an important role to play. The task I have set for myself is to advocate and advance the ethical and social values that I believe would enable our great nation to reach its full potential as:
- A nation in which the benevolent teachings of the Buddha permeate and influence all activity, and with the influence of the other great religions, help establish a caring society, in which law will secure justice for all.
- A nation where political parties reject violence, slander and aggression and learn to work together for the betterment of the people.
- A nation of peoples of different cultural traditions, each free to practice and develop those traditions, thereby enriching and strengthening the nation as a whole, and where women, no less than men, are enabled to make their full contribution and reach their full potential.
- A market-oriented economy through which our resourceful peoples may once more ensure steady economic growth, while making provision for assisting those who, for one reason or another, are not able to succeed in their endeavors.
- A confident nation open to the world, encouraging investment, and seeking to broaden the range of its trading partners.
- A nation that derives strength from its age-old traditions as well as its inherent capacity to adapt and to innovate while taking what is of value from the world at large.

Making the vision a reality: the Sri Lanka National Congress.

Ninety years ago, this vision was shared by the founders of the Ceylon National Congress. I believe that there is ample space within the UPFA, led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, to accommodate that vision. This is why I have decided to continue to work closely with and offer full support to the UPFA and the President, confident that he understands and encourages me to maintain a distinct identity. This is the spirit of consensual politics our nation sorely needs and is a founding principle behind the idea of a government of national unity.

Therefore I, together with a group of like-minded citizens have formed a new political party: the Sri Lanka National Congress. The name recalls a time when the leaders of the Ceylon National Congress united all our communities, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher, as well as Sinhalese, in a movement to win independence from foreign rule. That movement worked within a democratic and constitutional framework and won success; we plan to do the same.

The Sri Lanka National Congress will support the broad programme of President Mahinda Rajapaksa and become a constituent party of the UPFA. We will support the drive to achieve sustainable peace and unity among communities while strengthening the entire process by consistent emphasis on our core values and the vision I have outlined above.

Finally, I invite you to join me in this endeavor, which will mark the beginning of a new and dynamic period in our political history, guided by the social and ethical values we all cherish.



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