

# PAFFREL

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**PEOPLE'S ACTION FOR FREE & FAIR ELECTIONS**

## PRESS RELEASE

22 October 2026

Colombo

### **“PAFFREL Calls for Provincial Council Elections Without Further Delay and a Pilot of Alternative Voting to Protect Voters’ Rights”**

*PAFFREL shares political parties’ views on alternative voting and urges the Government, relevant ministries and responsible institutions to act.*

**COLOMBO** – The People’s Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) today urged the Parliament, the relevant ministries and the institutions responsible for elections to hold the long delayed Provincial Council elections without further delay, and to introduce and pilot alternative voting provisions in the Provincial Council elections and other elections that follow. PAFFREL made the call at a press briefing for Sinhala, Tamil and English language media personals, where it also presented the findings of its consultations with political parties on alternative voting.

### **Provincial Council elections: a political decision, not a technical problem**

It has been more than a decade since the last Provincial Council election. In the absence of elected representatives, the Provincial Councils function under Governors.

The governing party’s election manifesto, “A Thriving Nation – A Beautiful Life” (August 2024, p. 128, English Version), pledged that Provincial councils and local government elections, which are currently postponed indefinitely, will be held within a year to provide an opportunity for the people to join the governance. Local Government Authorities elections were held in May 2025, but the Provincial Council elections have still not been held, more than two years after the Government took office. Two years into its term, the Government has yet to announce a clear timeline or show visible preparations for the long-overdue Provincial Council elections.

Technical issues have been used by three governments as a tool for continuous delay. What is needed to hold the Provincial Council elections is a political decision. Whenever the Government decides, the necessary amendments can be made within about three months.

On 26 May 2026, PAFFREL convened political parties and civil society organisations in Colombo to discuss how the elections could be held quickly. All but one of the political parties present signed a joint declaration agreeing to hold the elections under the electoral system that existed before Act No. 17 of 2017, until the final outcome of the Parliamentary Select Committee is known, and to ensure on a voluntary basis 25% representation of women and youth. The meeting was attended by a representative of the governing party and by the four opposition Members of Parliament who serve on the Parliamentary Select Committee. The declaration was to be submitted to the Committee and to the Government.

#No.16, Byrde Place, Off Pamankada Rd, Colombo 06.

Tel : (+94) 11 2558570 / 11 2558571 Fax : (+94) 11 2558572

Email : [paffrel@sltnet.lk](mailto:paffrel@sltnet.lk) Web : [www.paffrel.com](http://www.paffrel.com)

## Alternative Voting: What the Political Parties Told PAFFREL

PAFFREL held discussions with recognized and newly established political parties and groups across the country on electoral reforms, and its findings rest on the information and data collected in those discussions. The views of 23 political parties were assessed on five proposals designed so that no eligible voter loses their vote because of work, health, confinement, distance or official duties. PAFFREL has advocated on alternative voting mechanisms for over a decade, and has estimated that nearly one million voters living in Sri Lanka cannot reach a polling station on election day.

- **Postal voting:** 22 of 23 parties (96%) consented to expanding postal voting, which is currently limited to government personnel on election duty. One party did not consent. Parties proposed extending it to private-sector and Free Trade Zone workers, remand prisoners, hospital patients and persons with disabilities, election monitors, media personnel and security personnel, and to migrant workers, dual citizens and refugees. Leaving out remand prisoners, who have not been convicted of any offence, is the exclusion hardest to justify.
- **Early voting, alternative polling centres, mobile voting and voting rights for Sri Lankans abroad:** No party opposed any of these. Fewer parties recorded a position on them. Fixed or temporary stations, for example in prisons and hospitals, were preferred over roving mobile teams, and parties raised concerns about cybersecurity, embassy administration, campaign fairness and monitoring in overseas voting.

Taken proposal by proposal, expanding postal voting is the strongest and is ready to move, with 22 of 23 parties (96%) in favour. Early voting and alternative polling centres were accepted by every party that gave a position and opposed by none, although the mechanism for overseas voters remains unclear for early voting, and security and monitoring concerns remain for alternative centres. Mobile voting centres drew the weakest support, with one party calling them impractical, and fixed or temporary stations were preferred. Voting rights for Sri Lankans abroad were agreed in principle, but the mechanism is still unresolved.

The parties' positions fall into four groups. Thirteen parties consented to expansion without raising specific conditions. Five stressed that overseas citizens, diaspora groups and dual citizens must be included in the voting process. Three raised practical concerns, including computer security, public mistrust, the feasibility of voting for blue-collar workers in the Middle East, and equal campaign opportunities for all parties abroad. One party did not consent. Some parties raised more than one point.

The governing party's election manifesto also pledged on Safeguarding the voting rights of immigrants within and outside of the country (p. 109, English Version), and to Facilitate the foreign employed Sri Lankan citizens to exercise their votes from the country they reside (p. 124, English Version). PAFFREL acknowledges the Government's willingness to formulate laws enabling Sri Lankans living abroad to vote, as shown in the Cabinet decision of 15 September 2025. That decision approved a committee of officials from the Election Commission and the relevant ministries to examine amending the existing laws or formulating new ones, and noted that India, Bangladesh and the Philippines already allow their citizens abroad to vote. PAFFREL urges that this commitment be carried through into law, and that the same thinking be applied to voters inside Sri Lanka. PAFFREL welcomes these commitments. The coming Provincial Council elections are the first opportunity to begin delivering on them.

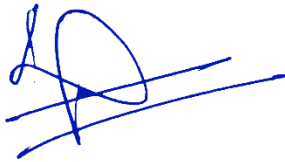
## PAFFREL's Key Calls for Action

1. **The Government** to take the political decision now, announce a firm date or time-bound roadmap for the Provincial Council elections, and bring forward the legal amendments needed without further committees or technical delays.
2. **Parliament and the Parliamentary Select Committee** to finalise their recommendations promptly, and to honour the 25% representation of women and youth agreed by the parties.
3. **The Government and the Election Commission** to include in the same legislative amendments provisions that allow alternative voting arrangements in Provincial Council elections, beginning

with expanded postal voting, and to pilot early voting and alternative polling centres in selected areas.

4. **The relevant ministries and institutions**, including those responsible for provincial councils, justice and prisons, health, labour and foreign employment, and the Legal Draftsman's Department, to work with the Election Commission so that remand prisoners, hospital patients, persons with disabilities, private-sector workers, media personnel, election monitors and security personnel are able to vote. Parties also proposed at least two days of leave before polling day for private-sector voters.
5. **The Election Commission** to run any pilot with clear eligibility rules, transparent procedures, independent monitoring and a published evaluation, so that the lessons can inform wider adoption in future elections.

PAFFREL stresses that no qualified citizen should lose a vote because of where they work, where they are held, or where they live. Piloting these measures in Provincial Council elections would allow safeguards to be tested before they are extended nationally.



Rohana Hettiarachchi  
Executive Director  
People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL)  
#16, Byrde Place, Off Pamankada Road, Colombo 06  
Mob: +94 77 759 0154  
Tel: +94 11 2558570 / +94 11 2558571  
Fax: +94 11 2558572  
Email: [paffrel@sltnet.lk](mailto:paffrel@sltnet.lk)  
Web: [www.paffrel.com](http://www.paffrel.com)