

09 September 2009-09-10

Honourable Minister Susil Premjyantha,
The Secretary,
United People's Freedom Alliance

Sir,

Regarding nominations for Provincial Councils

We observe that just as in the past, in the present process of giving nominations for election to the Southern Provincial Council, those who have actively worked for the progress of the SLFP for many years have been brushed aside and opportunities have instead been created for those who have no knowledge or experience of politics but have a public image. This follows a pattern we saw during the elections to the Sabaragamuwa and Western Provincial Councils.

What causes most concern to us is the manner in which women candidates in this election are being singled out and subject to vilification on the basis of their sexuality, while the same practice is not noticeable with regard to the male candidates. References to the sexual behaviour and personal life of men is not that often brought into the public arena; for women who dare to venture into the public and political arena, mud slinging on the basis of her private life has sadly become an inevitable and standard practice. Potential exposure to this kind of vilification is a primary factor that prevents women from entering into political life. The most recent example of this type of victimization can be seen from the slandering of Anarkali Akarsha, a candidate of the SLFP in the Southern Provincial Council elections in newspapers, on websites and on election platforms.

Whilst applauding the efforts taken by your party to increase women's political representation by nominating two popular actresses from your party, as activists in women's organizations who have consistently advocated the increased participation of women in politics, we are saddened by this trend. We feel that such a trend can also have a negative impact on the future of the SLFP as a whole.

Whether one is male or female, when one takes on a particular profession, the factors that should play a critical role are one's knowledge and experience of that profession. This should hold true for the political arena as well. This is the only way in which we can build confidence and respect for politics and politicians among the people. If the SLFP were to institute a process whereby women and men from the area who have been actively engaging in working for the upliftment of their community would be able to vie for nominations in a just manner, we feel that many of the negative features of the present situation could easily be avoided.

In such a scenario, women entering the field of politics would not have to fear harassment or vilification and the entry of women into politics would not become the subject of crude jokes in the media, among politicians and among the people at large.

We appeal to you do take all steps possible to create an environment in which the thousands of Sri Lankan women who are interested in entering into the political arena, especially at the Provincial and local levels, are able to do so with dignity, enjoying the equality of opportunity and treatment that they are entitled to.

Sincerely,

Women and Media Collective
Women's Resources Centre, Kurunegala
Uwa Wellassa Farmer Women's Organization, Buttala
Women's Development Centre, Badulla

Copy - The Honourable President
Secretary - Sri Lanka Freedom Party
All Parliamentary Members
All Women Provincial Councillors