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பெண்கள் மற்றும் ஊடகக் கூட்டமைப்பு
Women and Media Collective

Women's Call to the Presidential Candidates A Women's Manifesto for 2024/2025

Declaration

As women, we strive for an ethical political culture and a democratic and just society, within which all human rights are valued and protected by the state and where all people are equal. We strive for a society in which everyone can be free from harm, live with dignity, choose their own employment, have access to quality healthcare and education provided by the state, access decent housing, and live within a society and state where accountability is the norm and valued.

We assert that women's rights have historically been curtailed through a socially conservative interpretation of 'gender', which has dictated restrictive gender roles and harmful stereotypes.

We affirm that women and other historically marginalised communities should have the right to access justice and be treated fairly within the justice system. All workplaces should be safe and inclusive environments. The state should uphold this principle, as well as compel the private sector to uphold it.

Our demands:

1. Abolish the Executive Presidential System and introduce a constitutional structure with an Executive that is allied to Parliament through the Cabinet.
2. Ensure the independence of the judiciary.
3. Ensure the number of cabinet ministers do not exceed 20, and 50% of the Cabinet comprises of women.
4. Abolish the preferential system of voting and establish a new electoral system based on a combination of first-past-the post seats and proportional representation
5. Bring in legislation to prevent crossovers and allow citizens the right to recall Members of Parliament.
6. Provide for temporary special measures to ensure a minimum 30% representation of women, in Parliament, Provincial and Local Government and incremental measures to achieve parity of representation in all levels of government within ten years

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7. Introduce mandatory legal provisions to ensure that all registered political parties have at least 30% women in their key decision-making structures.
8. Ensure a gender balance in the appointments to all independent Commissions .
9. Ensure progressive thinking of future generations by including education on the concepts of peace, gender and gender equality in all national curricula.
10. Ensure all national level data is sex and gender disaggregated.
11. Fulfil constitutional obligations on equality and non-discrimination and ensure special measures are introduced to protect socio-economic and political rights of all persons, including people with disabilities
12. Ensure equal application of the law to all citizens, including all religious clergy
13. Recognize that the ageing population of Sri Lanka will be made up of a majority of women, and formulate policies to address their specific needs and concerns, including inter alia, housing, health, livelihoods and transportation

Constitutional Reform

14. Resume the Constitutional Reform process through the Constitutional Assembly (CA) taking into consideration the recommendations made by the Public Representations Committee and the Sub Committees of the CA.
15. The Right to Life for all must be recognized as a fundamental human right.

In this process consider that:

16. Recognition is given to the historical discrimination against and marginalised and ensure women the right to exercise autonomy and enjoy bodily integrity; sexual rights and reproductive health and the right to be free from violence and live in dignity, and provide effective remedy and redress for such violence.
17. Judicial review is enabled to determine the constitutionality of laws post enactment
18. Article 16 of the current constitution is repealed.
19. Sexual orientation and gender identity are introduced as explicit categories and are guaranteed protection under the non-discrimination clause, recognizing historic and continuing discrimination, despite the implicit inclusion in Article 12.
20. Economic, social and cultural rights are guaranteed as fundamental rights and are justiciable.
21. Non-state actors are held accountable for violations Article 12 .

Human Rights and Legal Reform

22. Commit to making human rights and non-discrimination cornerstones of all legislation and state structures.
23. Progressively incorporate all ratified international instruments, including CEDAW, into domestic legislation and review existing legislation for compliance with international human rights commitments.

24. Progressively implement the recommendations of the Consultations Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms (2017).
25. Ensure that all women shall enjoy equal rights to the inheritance, acquisition, management, administration, and disposition of property and ensure that all discriminatory laws (specifically including the Thesawalamei Law and the Land Development Ordinance) preventing such rights be repealed or amended.
26. Amend the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act of 1951 ensuring full realization of demands of Muslim women and full compliance with fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution within six months of securing the Presidency.
27. Amend the Penal Code and Election laws to introduce legislation that addresses the issue of violence against women in political life.
28. Ensure that public education on human rights and discrimination and all the areas mentioned here, are a key priority of the state.
29. Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and commit to not enacting the Anti-Terrorism Bill; instead use provisions in normal criminal law to ensure the safety of all citizens.
30. Ensure the Voluntary Social Services Ordinance (VSSO) is amended to protect freedom of association and dissent and that all non-governmental bodies are treated with similar legal and regulatory measures as all other legal entities.
31. Ensure that the criminal justice system is implemented in a fair and just manner and not abused for political reasons and that the rights of all those who come within its ambit are not violated.

Information and Hate-Speech

32. Ensure that multiculturalism is encouraged and prioritised, thereby establishing national coexistence; commit to enacting a National Policy to ensure this.
33. Amend the proposed Online Safety Bill to protect survivors and victims of Online abuse and ensure proper execution of the law against perpetrators.
34. Hold all perpetrators, irrespective of socio-political and religious status, to account in cases of incitement to violence.
35. Commit to strengthen and implement right to information procedures and mechanisms through public education and capacity-building, including for the state sector.

Language and Culture

36. Fully implement official languages policy and ensure compliance of the state sector.
37. Ensure greater appreciation of cultural pluralism to promote national integration through policy, legislation, education and practices, including the new National Policy on Culture.
38. Notwithstanding the above, ensure that culture should not override human rights of all citizens.

Development, Livelihoods and Ecological Justice

- 42 Ensure all development policies are inclusive and benefit all communities regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, disability, age and so on.
- 43 Commit to enacting special policies to address the issues of women in poverty, as a recognition of the feminization of poverty.
- 44 Recognize the contribution of women in sustainable agriculture and environmental management and take measures to protect their role in this sector, including to ensure land tenure and other economic resources for women.
- 45 Make initial environmental assessments of all development projects compulsory.
- 46 Develop a comprehensive national policy to face ecological challenges and put in place safeguards to minimise various disasters and accidents caused by climatic changes such as drought, forest fires, floods, landslides and sea erosion.
- 47 Take immediate and consistent action, with dedicated resources to prevent and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- 48 Support female and male farmers by increasing pensions and writing off farmers debts.
- 49 Support traditional livelihoods including those of women through more inclusive policy and resources.
- 50 Increase State support to expand the use of traditional seeds, and to prevent the acquisition of a monopoly in seeds by corporations.
- 51 Ensure non-destruction of forestation and conserve ecological systems.
- 52 Ensure that all environmental laws will be implemented without reservation and impunity in cases of violations.
- 53 Ensure energy security by developing renewable energy sources like biomass power, wind power, solar power and ocean energy and reduce the dependence on fossil fuel

Labour and Work

54. Include unpaid care work in the National Labour Force Survey and in the assessment of GDP.
55. Introduce measures in all development interventions to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work to ensure equality of women's access to paid work.
56. Introduce Paternity Leave for a minimum of 100 days.
57. Address discriminatory practices leading to the Gender Pay Gap in the formal and informal sectors.
58. Introduce and enforce stringent laws and regulations to effectively monitor and regulate micro finance and micro credit institutions
59. Ratify ILO Convention 190 on Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the World of Work
60. Ratify ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.
61. Withdraw all current discriminatory regulations restricting the right of women to migrate for overseas employment.

62. Ensure the protection of the law to all women, regardless of their chosen employment, thereby giving women the freedom to pursue employment of their own choosing
63. Introduce a pension scheme for women and men migrant workers
64. Introduce a contributory pension scheme to all citizens and ensure this is linked to the Cost of Living Index

Violence against Women and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

65. Expand the legal definitions of rape (to include marital rape), torture (to include sexual violence), and sexual harassment. Definitions of forms of violence against women should include technology-related violence.
66. Sentencing should reflect the broadened definitions above, and suspended sentences in cases of rape and sexual violence should be prohibited.
67. Ensure that all girls from all communities are equally protected by statutory rape law.
68. Amend legislation where necessary and enforce standardised practices of evidence-gathering which centre the testimony of the survivor/victim. Ensure that the practice of independent corroboration in the case of rape and sexual violence is abolished.
69. Enact amendments to the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act 2005 currently before the Legal Draftsperson within six months of securing the Presidency.
70. Repeal Section 303 of the Penal Code and ensure strengthened access to all sexual and reproductive healthcare choices, for all.
71. Repeal Sections 365 and 365A of the Penal Code which criminalise adult, consensual same-sex relationships in line with the 2023 Special Determination of the Supreme Court on the Penal Code Amendment Bill
72. Amend Section 399 of the Penal Code which criminalises ‘cheating by personation’ to ensure it cannot be used to legitimise discrimination against transgender persons; IGP of Police should endorse the validity of the Gender Recognition Certificate and issue directives to all police to consider this document valid.
73. Amend the Bribery Act and explicitly include the act of compelling sexual bribery.
74. Repeal the Vagrants Ordinance.
75. Delete the question in the birth certificate regarding the marital status of the parents.
76. Ensure that all policy and legislative interventions affecting women are based on evidence which reflect the lived realities of women.
77. Include age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality and reproductive education as an integral part of all educational curricula, including in teacher training.

Institutions and Policy

78. Enact legislation to ensure the independence of the judiciary .
79. Introduce a Directorate of Public Prosecutions bifurcating the office of the Attorney General and taking on the task of all prosecutions, including against the State.

80. Ensure that every person can exercise their right to access justice and that this right is justiciable; in cases where this right is violated, the victim should have access to timely remedies and immediate relief to support any required action.
81. Provide the necessary human and material resources to fast-track investigation and prosecution of violence against women cases, where cases should be completed at the most within the period of one year.
82. Conduct a review of all existing National Action Plans relevant to violence against women and consolidate implementation into one instrument.
83. Mandate that each police station should have a well-resourced Women and Children's Desk staffed by adequately trained officers who are proficient in local languages and that this service is available 24 hours of the day.
84. Develop policies for female heads of households, which enable an environment in which they can live free from harm and oppression, in dignity, where their socio-economic rights are protected, and their access to social welfare benefits are strengthened.
85. Commit to increasing the financial provisions towards maternal and child health in the budget to 3%.

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