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PRG expresses extreme concern about the alarming developments in Sri Lanka and the insensitivity of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to public calls for decisive changes

People's Rights Group (PRG), a rights-based advocacy and lobbying group based in the UK particularly dealing with human rights violations in Sri Lanka, notes with extreme concern, the current political, social and economic instability prevailing in Sri Lanka, which has unfortunately reached a crisis proportion, leading to grave public unrest and precipitating a spate of mass demonstrations and protests all over the Island.

A cursory glance of the cries and calls of the protesting public across racial, religious class divides, shows clear signs of growing frustration and disenchantment with the corrupt, inept political system, culture and conduct of the leadership in Post-Independence Sri Lanka in general and of the present administration in particular. Many memes, social media hashtags and slogans have emerged calling for the present political executive and legislative leadership to stand down, to lead the way to comprehensive changes, to ensure honesty, transparency and accountability at the top.

PRG has consistently advocated the imperative need for the political leadership to ensure both clean and transparent governance and follow sustainable policies that respect human rights, and ensure social justice, fairness and equality for all its people, as enshrined in the Constitution. However, subsequent governments wilfully ignored these social imperatives and chose to continue pursuing divisive, self-centred and corrupt politics which created fresh ethnic fault lines, widened inequality and caused social unrest.

This unfortunate trend became much more acute during the present regime of Mr Gotabaya Rajapakse, which abused the massive public mandate they obtained on a destructive racist, majoritarian platform, finally leading to a very stark divergence between what the government is doing and what the nation needs to progress. The wide powers vested in the President consequent to the enactment of the 20th Amendment to the Constitution also created a constitutional dictatorship, which usurped many basic rights and freedoms. The minorities - Tamils, Muslims and Christians - felt very insecure under this regime with their religious and cultural rights being openly violated, and with justice becoming more elusive. Muslims in particular were made scapegoats and bogeymen in the eyes of the majority for petty political gains. The irony was the growing disenchantment of the majority Sinhala Buddhist community too, which fortunately saw through the mala-fide nature of the divisive politics played by the rulers. The frustrations and consequent anger of the population thus became real, as the present trend of protests shows.

PRG also notes with concern, the futile attempts of the present rulers, to depict these widespread and unprecedented protests, as an 'Arab Spring' style operation, instigated by agent provocateurs of the Opposition and 'extremists'. Many of those arrested also included unconnected Muslims and Tamils, apparently to point out a 'minority extremist' link by implication. It is unfortunate that the rulers' thinking has become divergent, and not in resonance with the public pulse and sentiments.

PRG, therefore views this unfolding tragedy in Sri Lanka as both a serious cautionary tale for all Sri Lankans, and also an opportunity to start afresh. In this context, PRG urgently calls upon the President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, his government and the Parliament consisting of both ruling and opposition parties, to pay heed to public calls and be sensitive to growing frustrations and take necessary measures to restore their confidence in public office and institutions. It is clear that only an inclusive Sri Lanka where social and racial justice and respecting human rights prevail, will be the viable way forward for progress and earn international credibility for Sri Lanka. PRG also calls upon Sri Lankans to continue their laudable public activism and peaceful struggle to ensure a just and fair society devoid of racism and bigotry, where the rulers are held accountable and transparent, while subscribing to a clean political culture in which people of all denominations will be equally reaping the fruits of progress.