

## Press Release

### Proposals to reform Sri Lanka's constitution supported by the people

Sixty seven per cent of the Sinhalese and 86% of Tamils support the reforms proposed by the President's All Party Representative Committee (APRC). With minor adjustments this result could be improved according to a poll undertaken by Social Indicator of Colombo on behalf of Dr. Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies from the University of Liverpool. Ninety per cent of Muslims and 92% of 'Up-Country Tamils' also support the reforms.

Using methods developed as part of the Northern Ireland peace process 14 proposals for constitutional reform were tested against public opinion. Everyone interviewed was asked which proposals they considered to be 'essential', 'desirable', 'acceptable', 'tolerable' or 'unacceptable'. The proposals included the structure of the state, elections, parliament and devolution; the powers of the President and local authorities; language, religious and fundamental rights; the judiciary, public service and policing; amending the constitution and safeguards against secession.

The research identified two potential problems with these reforms. Firstly, as the President enjoys unparalleled popularity amongst the Sinhala people at 93% 'trust very much or trust quite a bit' they clearly do not want to see him step down from office as suggested in this draft of the APRC proposals. Twenty three per cent considered this item 'unacceptable'. Secondly, Tamils are split on the suggestion that 'Buddhism shall have 'pride of place' with religious freedom for all citizens being guaranteed'. Twenty eight per cent considered this proposal 'unacceptable' but 44% also thought it was 'essential'. Religious freedom for Hindus, Muslims and Christians is the key here and this needs to be clarified.

But overall the results are astonishingly good when compared to other conflicts around the world. For example the top priorities for the Tamils are 'Language Rights' at 85% 'essential or desirable' and 'Fundamental Rights' at 76%. The Sinhala also welcome these reforms at 71% 'essential or desirable' for 'Fundamental Rights' and 68% for 'Language Rights'. With only 9% of the Sinhala opposed to 'Language Rights' as 'unacceptable', there should be little political difficulty with their implementation.

Additionally the rejection of the APRC proposals as a 'package' falls to only 9% 'unacceptable' overall for the Sinhalese and just 2% for Tamils as people are willing to accept some proposals that they may not want for the sake of those that they do want. Due to the on going war at the time the poll was run it was not possible to include the Northern Province in the research. However, some indication of the views of these Tamils can be gained from the adjacent Eastern Province, which also only rejected the 'package' at 2% 'unacceptable', and supporters of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) at only 3%.

Given the consistency of these results it seems unlikely that a few minor changes or revisions will significantly alter this outcome and that the people of Sri Lanka will support the APRC or similar set of proposals. 'Winning the peace', is clearly in their leaders grasp.

Note: 1700 face -to-face interviews were completed between March 16 and 27 to produce a representative sample of Sri Lanka with the exception of the Northern Province. The margin of error is +/- 2.75%. A copy of the questionnaire and full results are available at [www.peacepolls.org](http://www.peacepolls.org).