

# **Sri Lanka: Hold Parliament Poll early, female activists urge Government**

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## **Call for halt of witch hunt of protestors; slam state of emergency**

The Women for Democratic Struggles (WDS) group yesterday (2) called upon the Government to call for an early General/Parliamentary Election, and for the Government to stop its witch hunt of protestors and key activists involved in the recent anti-Government protests.

“We unequivocally condemn the declaration of emergency by the present Government, and the repression of protestors by labelling them as drug addicts, fascists, terrorists, and extremists. We call on the Government to stop the witch hunt of protestors, and arbitrarily arresting them on trumped up charges.

“We call on the Government to desist from deploying the law relating to hate speech to arrest and intimidate protestors who are exercising their right to dissent, and to critique the actions of the Government,” the WDS said in a statement issued in this regard.

Noting that these tactics of repression are “not new”, especially as experienced by the people in the North and the East of the country, the WDS pointed to the harassment of family members of the disappeared, and the arbitrary arrest of innocent Muslims following the Easter Sunday terror attacks as past examples of oppression exercised by the State.

The “aragalaya” (struggle) protests have received the support of a broad cross-section of the Sri Lankan society. Women have enthusiastically participated in these protests. It is a movement of citizens who mobilised to protest against the economic hardships imposed by the Government, which no longer enjoys the trust or faith of the people. The right to peaceful assembly, protest, and dissent are critical to democracy.”

Thus, the WDS called on the Government to uphold the rule of law, and equality before the law.

“We call on the Government to hold to account those who were responsible for attacking peaceful protestors, and their tents on 9 May 2022. There is sufficient video evidence to arrest those perpetrators. We call on the Government to heed the call of the ‘aragalaya’ for systemic, structural changes, including the abolition of the Executive Presidency, and the expanded involvement of the people, including women and youth in the democratic decision making process, through the implementation of a people’s council. We also call on the Government to obtain a fresh mandate from the people by dissolving the Parliament, and calling for an early General Election.”

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**P.S.**

The Sunday Morning

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