

Declaration of the Southern Malaiyaha People

Petitions have been submitted to the government on behalf of the Sinhalese, Muslim, and Tamil communities, advocating for the development of the Malaiyaha people, especially those in the Southern Province. These communities have made substantial contributions to the nation's economy for the past 200 years, underscoring the importance of addressing their needs and fostering their growth.

Voice of the Plantation People Organization (VOPP) is a civil organization dedicated to advocating for the rights and development of the Malaiyaha people living in the Southern Province, particularly in Galle, Matara, and also in Kalutara, Kurunegala, and Gampaha districts. One of the key objectives of VOPP is to promote reconciliation among different ethnic groups. Over the past six months, VOPP has conducted a series of community peace dialogues in Galle and Matara districts, focusing on themes of reconciliation and democracy to foster harmony among Sinhala, Muslim, and Malaiyaha youth and women.

During these dialogues, participants deeply analyzed the issues faced by the Malaiyaha people and formulated their own demands. They have called on the Governor of the Southern Province and government officials to present these demands to civil organizations and engage in discussions to resolve the problems of the Malaiyaha people.

Therefore, today, on the 12th of June 2024, we urge you to accept these demands and take concrete steps to address the issues facing the Malaiyaha community.

Land Titles and Land Title Document:

1. Provide land titles for the Malaiyaha people of the Galle and Matara plantation areas, ensuring their land rights. These land titles have been issued on various occasions from 1993 to 2018.
2. To address the needs of those who have not yet received land and housing facilities, we request that priority be given to the Malaiyaha people of Galle and Matara districts in the current government project for land and housing facilities. Additionally, special measures should be taken to resolve land disputes involving the Malaiyaha people in large plantation areas.
3. Develop a mechanism for data collection on the Malaiyaha people who have received land and housing facilities.

Providing basic facilities to the Malaiyaha people and delivering public services appropriately:

1. Establishing estate hospitals to provide access to health services in areas near plantations.
2. Addressing the lack of functioning drinking water, latrine facilities, and waste disposal services through local government bodies by developing activities for proper waste disposal.

3. Resolving access road issues in the estates by reforming the roads and implementing measures for proper maintenance and protection.
4. Improving postal services for estates and providing private addresses for Malaiyaha dwellings in accordance with the Supreme Court judgment.
5. Ensuring the provision of Aswesuma social benefits to Malaiyaha people who have not yet received them, and implementing a program to identify and address deficiencies.
6. Ensuring the proper disbursement of the Rs.1700 salary as promised by the government.

School Education and Vocational Training Facilities for Malaiyaha Children

1. Take measures to provide teachers for core subjects, including mathematics, science, and English, to the 10 Tamil schools in the Southern Province.
2. Provide vocational training and employment opportunities for Malaiyaha youth who have completed their school education.
3. Address the higher dropout rate among Malaiyaha girls living in plantation areas of the Southern Province. The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education should collect relevant information and implement measures to solve this problem and improve the educational level of Malaiyaha children.
4. Undertake special programs through the Divisional Secretariat to develop the skills of Malaiyaha children, promoting their rights and artistic culture.
5. Appoint Tamil officers to ensure the use of the Tamil language in government institutions.
6. It is reported that children below 16 years of age are employed in private and small tea plantations in Galle and Matara districts. However, they are afraid to testify. Therefore, appoint a special committee to investigate the matter and take legal action

Improving the upliftment of Malaiyaha women.

1. Malaiyaha women should also be given better status in society. Therefore, special programs should be implemented at the divisional secretariat units to develop the education and personality of these women.
2. Activities need to be devised to reach out to Malaiyaha women, in addition to the services provided for other women at regional, national, and provincial levels.
3. Plantation companies often attempt to avoid the system of future savings such as EPF (Employee Provident Fund) and ETF (Employees' Trust Fund) for Malaiyaha women. At the same time, tea plantations should reconsider the adverse effects of the Out-Grower System, and the production system should be immediately revised to ensure continuous fair employment and social security for women.
4. Estate women are required to submit numerous documents and obtain signatures from witnesses to obtain loans from banks properly. As a result, women suffer greatly as they cannot access loans from recognized banks and resort to getting loans from microcredit institutions that charge high interest rates. Therefore, better methods of obtaining loans from

government banks and approved financial institutions should be established to simplify the process.

5. Lack of sanitation facilities and restrooms in tea estates especially affects women. Therefore, the government should advise plantation companies to improve their facilities.
6. Implementation of a special action plan is necessary to investigate and monitor the conditions of families and children of women who have gone abroad as domestic workers due to family poverty, ensuring the future security of their children.

In conclusion, we urge the government to heed these demands and take immediate steps to address the grievances of the Malaiyaha community. Let this 12th of June 2024 mark a turning point in our journey toward equality, justice, and prosperity for all Sri Lankans.

Signed,

Voice of the Plantation People Organization, in collaboration with Sinhalese, Muslim, and Malaiyaha youth and women representatives from Galle and Matara districts.