

Seek public views on new Constitution – PAFFREL

Executive Director of the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), Rohana Hettiarachchi on 15 November forwarded a letter to the Experts Committee to Draft a New Constitution on the need to obtain public views on its drafting.

PAFFREL has drawn the attention of the Committee to eight facts including drafting a Constitution that prioritises the aspirations of the people with a long-term vision, regardless of political party aspirations or political issues that exist at a particular moment.

The letter has further highlighted that the legislative process should be conducted in such a way that the rights of all communities are protected.

“The committee should focus on the formulation of a Constitution that is acceptable to all, with adequate room for

alternative ideologies. In drafting the Constitution, the views and aspirations of every group should be represented and the legitimacy of a Constitution is achieved through such broad public participation.

We propose that a comprehensive publicity campaign should be launched to encourage the public to comment on the Constitution, as at present the primary focus of the public has been towards the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the last date for public views is 30 November, the Committee should focus on taking steps to provide a reasonable and adequate period for that to take place as the time given for the public to have their say is not sufficient due to the spread of the pandemic in the country.

Additionally, attention should be paid to setting up

a mechanism at the District level to facilitate people to express their views. As the process of typing and sending public views is a complex task for certain groups, we suggest that it should be facilitated in a manner that is convenient to them. In particular, it would be more effective to contact the Committee and introduce several telephone numbers to assist persons who need any clarifications.

The Committee should also focus on the possibility of using video technology for the convenience of the vast majority of people who use technological tools in the new environment,” the letter added. The letter further emphasises that it is the primary responsibility of all citizens to help to make a new Constitution that represents their aspirations by learning from the past experiences.