***“*Land Day Declaration: Ensuring Land Rights for Sri Lanka’s Landless Population”**

**LAND DAY- 21.06.2023.**

“Land is not simply a commodity; rather it is an essential component for the realization of numerous fundamental human rights.

Land holds a multifaceted significance that profoundly impacts the realization of various human rights. It serves as the fundamental foundation for livelihoods and economic rights for numerous individuals, while also intricately linked to personal identity. The United Nations highlights the strong link between land rights and the protection of social and cultural rights. It emphasizes that land policies and their implementation directly affect crucial aspects such as food, culture, water, health, employment, and overall quality of life.

Sri Lanka, with its diverse ethnic and linguistic population, faces considerable challenges of landlessness, particularly among the Hill Country Tamils, also known as *Malayaha Thamilargal*, who have endured landlessness for over two decades. There has long been a clarion call to demand the realization of land rights, encompassing vital aspects such as life and livelihood. However, these crucial issues must be explicitly declared as a central theme within mainstream politics. The Hill Country people have been deprived of their basic rights including citizenship, franchise, land, education, language, and access to government services due to the unfavorable policy decisions made by the government. Denial of their rightful land rights stands out as a major obstacle hindering their growth and development.

Therefore, as political representatives, trade unions, and civil society organizations, let us join hands to collaborate in building Sri Lanka, securing land rights, and fostering peace. By doing so, we can ensure the dignified lives of the Hill Country people, enhance their livelihoods, and consequently contribute to the overall economic development of our nation.

**Key Demands**:

* Promote equitable access to land rights for the entire landless community in Sri Lanka.
* Ensure the acquisition of sufficient and suitable land, accompanied by valid deeds, to construct adequate housing for the Hill country population, thereby guaranteeing their lives are lived with dignity.
* Streamline the implementation of relevant and appropriate laws to facilitate the acquisition of deeds for individually constructed houses within the Estate sector.
* Establish a community-based framework comprising small landholders to strengthen food sovereignty and improve the livelihoods of the Hill Country community.
* Ensure the land rights of the Hill country people, thus fostering the preservation of their cultural, traditional, and religious heritage, while also ensuring improved infrastructure facilities.
* Ensure comprehensive land ownership for the Hill Country community, enabling them to access agricultural subsidies, opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship, and government assistance for self-employment, thereby fostering their socio-economic empowerment.
* Ensure the segregation of the predominant geographical area inhabited by the Hill country people from the estates, establishing it as separate villages under the jurisdiction of local government authorities and divisional secretaries. This administrative organization will facilitate their access to a wide range of government services and support.
* Grant the Hill Country people the right to safeguard and preserve the water bodies, wilderness areas, and the environment within their communities, empowering them to actively participate in the protection and conservation of these invaluable natural resources.
* **“Let’s promote the active participation of the Hill country people in the mainstream activities of the country by securing their land rights, thus enabling them to lead dignified lives and pursue sustainable livelihoods.”**