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The leaders of several political parties represented in Parliament have informed me that they will be challenging the purported dissolution of Parliament in the Supreme Court. Since the President has prevented Parliament from ruling on the legitimacy of the President's actions, it will be up to the Supreme Court to determine the legality of these actions.

As the custodian of Parliament, I have watched over the last two weeks as the executive Branch has seized the rights and usurped the powers of Members of Parliament who were elected to represent the people. The wilful disregard demonstrated by the executive towards Parliament, the engine of Sri Lanka's sovereignty, leaves the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens at grave risk of similar abuse.

Under these dire circumstances, I urge all public servants who have sworn an oath to defend the Constitution to revisit that oath. Ask why we are required to pledge fealty to this document and not to any one person or a single position of power. Our foremost duty is to the Constitution. I ask all public servants across the country to remember their obligations to this supreme law of our motherland, and to safeguard the independence of the public service, police and the judiciary. I call upon all public servants to refuse to execute any illegal orders they may receive, no matter from whom.

Every citizen who is entrusted with responsibilities under the Constitution should think first of the country and not of party politics or personal affiliations. We must all act with patriotism and independence to safeguard the future of democracy in our country.

I lament that the purported Foreign Minister, a highly regarded politician, has falsely alleged that I intended to prevent the President from delivering the Statement of Government Policy when Parliament was set to reconvene on 14th November. It is on this imaginary premise that the Minister suggests that Parliament had to be dissolved.

I wish that the purported minister had proposed a more honest and plausible excuse for the actions of his colleagues, that would have drawn less ridicule to our country on the world stage. Based on this fiction, several of his cohorts have openly threatened to send me to jail.

The actions of the Speaker and Parliament may not always be aligned with the wishes of the executive. This tradition of parliamentary independence dates to at least 1641, when Speaker William Lenthall of the House of Commons shielded members of that house from being arrested by King Charles I. He knelt before his king and said "*May it please your majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as this house is*

pleased to direct me whose servant I am here; and humbly beg your majesty's pardon that I cannot give any other answer than this is to what your majesty is pleased to demand of me."

A floor vote on the legitimacy of the government was requested by 124 Members of Parliament. 116 Members met me in person. Another eight thereafter contacted me and expressed their support of this motion. Just as Speakers of Parliaments have done for centuries before us, I ruled in favour of the rights of the majority of Members and political parties represented in Parliament and declared that I would allow a floor vote. No member made request that the Statement of Government Policy be prevented nor would I have entertained such a request.

As a former military officer, I have always been prepared to make whatever sacrifice that my country may require of me. It has been my privilege to stand up to the executive and defend the rights of Parliament, the supremacy of our Constitution and the sovereignty of the people.

For the record I am prepared to face any consequences for these actions without hesitation.



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