

## Press Statement by Swami Agnivesh

### BLATANT FLOUTING OF PROPRIETIES IN KARNATAKA ELECTIONS

The pitching of the full might of the Central Government to the benefit of a party in the recently concluded assembly elections in Karnataka is a blatant violation of democratic proprieties and it merits strong condemnation.

It is crucial for democracy that, once a party is elected to power, the government thus formed belongs to all citizens equally. The distinction between the party and the government is vital for democratic governance. This discipline is the essence of the oath that ministers, including the Prime Minister, take at the time of swearing in. No member of the cabinet can act or advocate in a partisan fashion in any context.

This benchmark in democratic governance has been flagrantly flouted in the Karnataka elections. The Prime Minister addressed 21 meetings. Nearly 40 members of his cabinet camped in Karnataka, to the gross neglect of national responsibilities for days. Enormous expenses were incurred in the process at the expense of the taxpayer. In effect the Karnataka elections appears to have been between the Government of India and other parties, which is unfair and unacceptable.

Just as being non-partisan is basic to the office of the President, the Vice President, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the judges, even heads of small institutions, it must be deemed non-negotiable for the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues. Elections are to be fought between parties, if a level playing field is to be ensured. Nothing less than this will ensure that the elections are free and fair.

I call upon the Election Commission of India, as well as every citizen of India, to ensure that this disturbing trend is arrested and sufficient correctives put in place to ensure that the democratic character of people's franchise is not vitiated.