



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS RELEASE

NAMFREL Bantay ng Bayan UPDATE #2

December 17, 2022, 7pm

NAMFREL releases update on its observations on the conduct of the 2022 Baliwag Plebiscite

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released a second update on its observations on the conduct of the December 17, 2022 Baliwag Plebiscite, to ratify the conversion of the municipality into a component city. The second update covers the closing and counting processes observed in the polling places. Observations are being sent in by NAMFREL observers electronically and through paper forms. Observations are contained in observation forms that are being sent in electronically by NAMFREL's observation team in Baliwag to NAMFREL headquarters.

In general, NAMFREL observers described the conduct of the closing and counting processes as smooth and peaceful. Observers also noted that watchers had an unimpeded view of the ballots as they were read, as well as the election returns and tally board. However, while the counting was transparent, there were very few observers who could further strengthen the process by being able to ascertain that what was being read was accurate.

In a polling place in Tiaong Elementary School in Brgy. Tiaong, the Plebiscite Committee (PlebCom) did a recount of votes when the recorded number of voters who actually voted did not tally with the valid ballots. According to a NAMFREL observer there, the said PlebCom also did not use a Tally Board and recorded the votes being read directly onto their paper form.

In a polling place in Mariano Ponce National High School in Brgy. Bagong Nayon, members of the PlebCom appeared not to know whether to consider it as spoiled or used two blank ballots. They admitted that the training they received may not have been enough, and the procedure was not explained properly. According to a NAMFREL observer, the PlebCom members also found it difficult to fill out certain forms manually because they were used to the automated system wherein the vote counting machine performed said part of the process.

As of writing, ballot boxes have started arriving at the Baliwag municipal hall, and the Plebiscite Board of Canvassers has been convened. The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) said it expects to finish the canvassing of results by midnight.

NAMFREL has been accredited by the COMELEC as citizens' arm for the Baliwag Plebiscite, and for this electoral exercise, NAMFREL has deployed an Election Expert Mission (EEM) to look into the issues surrounding the exercise, as well as to observe the process on plebiscite day. NAMFREL will continue to follow the canvassing process, and expects to receive more observations in the coming hours until tomorrow morning from its observers onsite.

NAMFREL will be submitting a final report to the COMELEC on the findings of the observation, identifying areas that could be further strengthened, and recommending measures to help ensure the conduct of safer and more efficient electoral exercises.

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