



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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MEDIA RELEASE

NAMFREL Bantay ng Bayan UPDATE #1

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NAMFREL releases preliminary observations on the 2023 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE)

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released its preliminary observations on the conduct of the October 30, 2023 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE). NAMFREL has been accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as citizens' arm for the 2023 BSKE, and for these electoral exercises, NAMFREL chapters have deployed teams of volunteers to observe the election day procedures in the voting centers.

The preliminary observations cover the opening procedures as well as the first few hours of voting, including arrangements inside the voting centers. Observations are sent by observers through NAMFREL observation forms, as well as through phone calls.

NAMFREL observers reported that the voting process has been generally peaceful and orderly so far. Observers reported that COMELEC Electoral Boards appear well-prepared in general, citing their systematic handling of the process inside the polling places. Observers also reported that voting started on time at 7am, with members of the EBs as well as the election materials to be used complete. While observers from all over the country reported the usual cases of voters being unable to find their names on the lists, observers also cited the importance and usefulness of the COMELEC's Precinct Finder as well as the Voter Assistance Desks (VADs) in facilitating the conduct of the voting process.

NAMFREL observers reported that in most voting centers observed so far, there has been a high turnout of voters, especially among senior citizens who turned up early outside voting centers prior to the start of voting. In general, regular voters outnumber SK voters, reflecting the fact that there are more regular-age voters registered than SK voters. In places with low turnout of voters this morning, NAMFREL observers said the numbers may increase as the day progresses. In Nueva Valencia, Guimaras, NAMFREL volunteers said turnout was low early this morning due to rainy weather. In Zamboanga City, observers reported that some voters who are daily wage earners want to vote later after work.

In Dasmariñas Elementary School in Cavite where the automated election system is being pilot-tested for the BSKE, NAMFREL observers reported that there has been no issues so far, besides some confusion among the members of the EB as to the start of voting, but voting still started on time.

In Al-Barka, Basilan, NAMFREL observers reported that AFP personnel has been requested by members of the Electoral Boards to be present at the entrance to polling places to provide security to the EBs. In Malaig Elementary School in Balindong, Lanao del Sur, NAMFREL observers reported that soldiers equipped with tasers are stationed at polling places to maintain peace and order.

In Cotabato City, NAMFREL observers reported that about 15% of EBs in Vilo Central Elementary School resigned the day before election day due to concerns regarding their security, especially during the counting. The EBs were replaced by PNP personnel.

Also in Cotabato City, in Kimpo Elementary School, NAMFREL observers were barred by local police to enter the voting center to observe the elections. The observers were told that no media or external observers were to be permitted inside.

NAMFREL is currently verifying with its NAMFREL chapters other incidents reported in the media that appear to be election-related. NAMFREL will include them in forthcoming updates once verified by the NAMFREL volunteers on the ground.

NAMFREL will continue to gather observations throughout the day. Voting will end at 3pm, and counting and canvassing of votes will commence after that. 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. ###