



## **NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **NAMFREL Bantay ng Bayan UPDATE #1**

**March 18, 2023, 1:30pm**

#### **NAMFREL releases preliminary observations on the 2023 Marawi Plebiscites**

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released its preliminary observations on the conduct of the March 18, 2023 Plebiscites in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur to ratify the creation of Barangays Boganga II and Datu Dalidigan in Marawi City. NAMFREL has been accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as citizens' arm for the Marawi Plebiscites, and for these electoral exercises, NAMFREL Lanao del Sur has deployed teams of volunteers to observe the plebiscite day procedures being conducted in two voting centers in Marawi City.

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 in general, the conduct of the plebiscite has been peaceful, and that the morning's activities are characterized by a high turnout of voters. As early as 9:30am in one polling place in Bito Elementary School, 133 out of 142 registered voters had already cast their votes. In another polling place in the same school, 275 out of 329 voters had already voted by 10am. According to NAMFREL observers, the high turnout could be attributed to the people's eagerness to vote. There was also free transportation provided to those who wanted to go to the voting centers, a project started by the city government prior to this plebiscite and originally intended for use of indigenous peoples. NAMFREL observers also noted that there has been a high turnout of youth voters.

The voter turnout resulted in crowding inside the voting centers, especially in looking for their names on the voter lists. While the Plebiscite Committees (PlebComs) try to limit the number of voters inside polling places to 10 voters at any given time, Covid protocols have not been strictly enforced and followed, especially physical distancing and wearing of face masks. Voters take 2 to 3 minutes to cast their votes.

NAMFREL observers did not see any express lanes for senior citizens, PWDs, and the heavily pregnant, but they are being prioritized in voting. There are no Emergency Accessible Polling Places (EAPPs). There are also no Isolation Polling Places (IPPs) seen, but medical teams from the city health office are present inside the voting centers.

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. ###