MEDIA RELEASE
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NAMFREL Releases Preliminary Assessment of the 2025 National and Local Elections

NAMFREL wishes to congratulate the Filipino people for again turning out in droves to vote on election day and making their voices heard through their votes. NAMFREL also expresses its deep appreciation for all its Bantay ng Bayan volunteers nationwide for following all processes of election day and helping ensure that Philippine elections are free, fair, and transparent.

As NAMFREL continues to receive observations from its volunteers deployed nationwide, NAMFREL is able to see a clearer picture of the conduct of election day processes.

NAMFREL reiterates its initial assessment on election morning that in general, the 2025 national and local elections were peaceful and orderly. However, NAMFREL has also noted that in some parts of the country, election day was marred by violence and other public disturbances that caused disruption and delay in the conduct of election day processes in said areas. Election day also saw issues related to the automated counting machines (ACMs), and to physical arrangements in voting centers usually expected because of high voter turnouts, that brought about inconvenience to many voters.

Violence and other disturbances to peace and order

NAMFREL condemns the incidents of violence reported and verified by NAMFREL observers that took place in several municipalities of Lanao del Sur, as well as in SIlay, Negros Occidental and in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte. NAMFREL is also following other incidents reported in the media but have not been verified by our volunteers. Violence has no place in a democratic society. NAMFREL encourages authorities to thoroughly investigate these incidents and bring the perpetrators to justice.

NAMFREL is part of the Independent Election Monitoring Center (IEMC) for BARMM and Sulu, a collaborative initiative led by several organizations including NAMFREL, the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG), Notre Dame University (NDU), Notre Dame Broadcasting Corporation (NDBC), Climate Conflict Action, Coalition for Social Accountability and Transparency (CSAT), and PPCRV Cotabato City. Based in NDU in Cotabato City, the IEMC aims to uphold electoral integrity by tracking election-related incidents, conducting real-time results reporting, and facilitating engagement with stakeholders such as COMELEC, security agencies, and the media. The IEMC has been releasing reports since before election day. The Center will further intensify its partnerships and activities as the Bangsamoro region gets closer to the 2025 BARMM Parliamentary Elections scheduled for October.

Automated counting machines (ACMs)

NAMFREL continues to receive election day reports about the automated counting machines (ACMs) not performing as expected, observed in a number of polling places across the country. NAMFREL observers, however, have emphasized that most of the reported incidents involving the ACMs were immediately resolved. Some of the most common observations related ACMs were the following:

- Ballots not being accepted because scanners were not clean; ACM lens needed to be wiped, which took up to 20 minutes in some cases
- Ballots not being accepted at first try, but fixed by re-inserting the ballots
- Ballot paper jam due to ballot tear or crease
- Voter-verified paper audit trail paper jam
- ACMs slowing down, attributed to overheating

There were reports of voters complaining that their VVPAT indicated an overvote for a position and thus invalidating the vote, while voter insisted that they did not overvote..

Polling place and voting center woes

Apart from issues concerning ACMs, a common observation made by NAMFREL observers inside polling places was the lack of vote secrecy, some due to members of the electoral boards (EBs) inserting the filled out ballots instead of the voters. There was also a lack of ballot secrecy folders according to observers, or voters unable to fill out their ballots immediately because people lining up to insert their ballots in the ACM still had the folders with them.

Usual problems associated with high turnout of voters were again observed in the 2025 NLE, including overcrowding, long queues, and lack of seating including for members of vulnerable sectors. Many voters spent a considerable amount of time trying to find their names on the voter lists, trying to know their precinct numbers, and trying to locate their polling places.

NAMFREL observers consider the presence of Voter Assistance Desks (VADs), onsite volunteers providing assistance especially to members of vulnerable sectors, and the decision to have early voting hours, as bright spots in the 2025 NLE.

Election results

After the close of polls, issues arose that NAMFREL found alarming.

1. **There was delay in the reception of election returns** through the COMELEC-provided and -assigned servers for stakeholders' use, one each for NAMFREL, the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), Media, Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats Party (Dominant Majority Party), and the Nacionalista Party (Dominant Minority Party).

The expectation set during COMELEC briefings was that stakeholders will receive electronically transmitted election returns shortly after the close of polls and in 15-minute intervals after receipt of the first transmission. This expectation was not met.

Stakeholders received empty results packages between the close of polls and 8:56pm, the time when the first results package that contained 30% of the expected election returns was received.

In explaining the possible cause of delay, COMELEC said that receipts of ER transmission require time to process. Except for the 2016 "ñ" issue and the 2019 7-hour glitch, receipt of results packages in previous elections was timely and uneventful.

NAMFREL believes that there is an underlying issue that may have caused the delay in the receipt of results packages. We ask the COMELEC to determine and explain the cause of delay.

2. **The reported double recording of election returns** and the subsequent adjustments made to the aggregated unofficial and partial results.

The COMELEC explained that the first set of election returns received were packed into a results package and delivered to the stakeholders' assigned servers. The next set of election returns received were similarly packed into a results package together with the previously received election returns. The subsequent election returns received were similarly packed in the same compounding manner.

NAMFREL is aware of the manner of packing the election returns into results packages and its program is able to detect the changes between results packages and thus avoid such double entry. Other stakeholders are similarly aware of the manner of packing the election returns into results packages.

3. **Intermediary Process?** In explaining the delay in reception and double recording of election returns, the COMELEC mentioned that the election returns had to be processed. In past elections where the AES was used, ERs had to undergo the same process of decrypting each election return, converting the election return into CSV format, packing the election returns into results packages, and delivering the results package to each server.

NAMFREL requests the COMELEC to clarify the following points:

- If the ACM transmits directly to each COMELEC-provided server assigned to each stakeholder, is the intermediary process done in each server? If not, where is it done? If it is, was the source code of the process reviewed?

- If the ACM transmits directly to each COMELEC-provided server, the server could have received single ER transmissions.

- Packing the ERs into results packages is unnecessary and simply allows the stakeholders to decrypt each ER received by providing the stakeholders the password for decryption.

NAMFREL has previously recommended that the ER format to be transmitted electronically be in election markup language. This format does not need to be converted into CSV.

NAMFREL Operation QR Count 2025 (OQC 2025)

NAMFREL launched the NAMFREL Operation QR Count 2025 or OQC 2025 to enable everyone, not just NAMFREL volunteers, to help independently verify transmitted election

results by scanning the QR codes of election results printed prior to transmission, on the election returns posted outside polling places, and on the voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT). NAMFREL released two apps for the 2025 NLE. The first is the ER QR code scanning app which was made available to the public, and a VVPAT scanning app made available to select NAMFREL volunteers.

There was a total of 4,312 downloads for the public app. There were 668,671 ER QR codes scanned which represented 2,787 distinct precincts nationwide. Transmission came from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. NAMFREL is in the process of comparing each and every QR code with the electronically transmitted results.

For VVPAT scanning, COMELEC allowed NAMFREL to do so in 10 clustered precincts in each of the following regional groupings -- Northern Luzon, Southern Luzon, NCR, Visayas, Mindanao, and BARMM -- for a total of 60 clustered precincts. From the target 60 precincts, NAMFREL received VVPAT data from 52 precincts, for a total of 49,432 QR codes scanned. NAMFREL is still in the process of auditing and comparing them with the ERs from the selected precincts.

Reports of technical difficulties were sent to the NAMFREL systems team, majority of which is the challenge in transmitting the data scanned. This is mostly attributed to the server capacity which eased out after peak use. There were also reports of the apps not able to scan QR codes. This can be attributed to several factors including camera of the phone, lighting, and process of scanning. All recommendations and complaints are collated and will be used for future versions of the apps.

In summary, despite the short period between election day and the announcement of the public app, and getting approval from COMELEC for VVPAT scanning, NAMFREL was able to encourage public participation, perform the tasks and achieved the objective of having an independent verifiable data source and data path. With time and budget constraints, the system was able to set a framework for a much larger operation that can effectively pave way for a precinct level audit done within Election Day.

Election Data Analytics: NAMFREL-APC-Geodata Collaboration for the 2025 NLE

In pursuit of promoting transparency and data-driven engagement in the 2025 Philippine midterm elections, NAMFREL has partnered with Asia Pacific College (APC) and Geodata Systems Technologies, Inc. to establish a collaborative election data analytics initiative, designed to enhance public understanding of election outcomes, monitor transmission anomalies, and identify trends in voting behavior through an integrated system of data aggregation, processing, and presentation.

An Election Analytics Dashboard was developed and hosted at the APC, which committed to aggregate and analyze election data—particularly electronically transmitted election returns provided by NAMFREL. Student analysts, under faculty supervision, are tasked with processing raw election data to identify irregularities, create visualizations, and present summaries accessible to the public and stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Geodata Systems contributes critical geospatial and technical expertise. Its role focuses on the secure handling, transformation, and mapping of election-related data, including precinct-level information, election returns from 2022 and 2025, and projection modeling for analytics. By aligning the datasets spatially and demographically, Geodata

supports deeper insights into voter turnout, regional variances, and possible data discrepancies.

Preliminary analysis of data from the initial hours following the close of polls revealed the issues that were earlier discussed in this report, notably a significant delay in the transmission of results to the servers assigned to NAMFREL (and to other stakeholders as it turned out), and the aggregated results reflecting signs of double recording, likely due to the compounding manner in which results packages were prepared and delivered.

The NAMFREL-APC-Geodata collaboration marks a significant step toward institutionalizing evidence-based election monitoring and promoting digital accountability. By mobilizing academic talent, leveraging private-sector analytics capabilities, and sustaining civic vigilance, the partnership not only enhances the credibility of the 2025 elections but also sets a precedent for how future electoral exercises can be safeguarded through innovation and collaboration.

Random Manual Audit (RMA)

NAMFREL is a member of the Coalition of Civil Society and Professional Organizations (CSPOs) in the Random Manual Audit Committee (RMAC). The RMAC also includes the Commission on Elections and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). The CSPOs are led by the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), with the Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE), and the Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants (PICPA) as the other members.

Ballot boxes from 762 clustered precincts in 254 legislative districts have been randomly selected on election day using a software developed by PSA.

The Random Manual Audit (RMA) commenced on May 14, 2025 with the receipt of ballot boxes at the Citadines Bay City Manila, the central venue of the RMA.

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