



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

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### **PRESS RELEASE 28 April 2010**

#### **ABRA REMAINS A HOT SPOT**

NAMFREL keeps track of violence-prone areas in every election that it observes since 1983. It studies their causes or what triggers the violence in each election. Too often these provinces remain the same problem areas in every election. There are a number of factors that cause election-related violence. "Political-dynasties" are a fact of Philippine political life. Elections particularly the local elections become the battleground for long standing and too often bitter rivalries among feuding families. The campaign heats up to such intensity that violence is committed by the followers of the competing families.

Political power brings with it economic power. As a result, the electoral contest degenerates into a fierce "all or nothing battle" between the political contestants. The local politicians or their families control the local economy. Too often, the candidates stop at nothing if only to win the election. Unfortunately, violence is sadly the result of such fierce competition.

Another factor is the weak institutions that can restrain or moderate intense competition among the candidates/parties competing in an election such as the law enforcement agencies of the government, an electoral body that does not act impartially and the lack of political will to investigate and prosecute the wrongdoers.

On May 3, the en banc COMELEC will be deciding which of the 80 provinces in the country will be declared election hot spots and thereby be placed under the poll body's supervision. The police and military authorities, together with COMELEC and DILG officials in "candidate provinces" have been asked to declare their position and recommend on the finalization of election hot spots.

It appears that the present military and police leadership in Abra are averse to placing the province under COMELEC control, citing that there are no deaths /casualties yet due to elections.

Based on reports from its volunteers in Abra, NAMFREL recommends that the province be placed under COMELEC control in view of the existence of politicians' private armies, visits of goons/ private armies in houses to warn voters about "the right way to vote", the perceived closeness of the military and police to a political family, and two –election-related ambushes that occurred in Penarubio and Tineg. That these were real ambushes are being debated by the townspeople; whether these are authentic or not does not diminish the culture of violence in the province. Certain citizens of Abra are staying away from the province until after the elections to avoid being sucked into the vortex of election violence.

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