



## National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL)

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### NAMFREL Statement on the Conduct of the 2013 Barangay Elections

The Barangay Elections conducted on October 28, 2013 passed with considerable success and was generally peaceful despite reports of sporadic violence across the country. The occurrence of sporadic violence is due to the intense rivalry in local politics.

However there are still practices and serious election offenses that continue to cast a dark shadow on the electoral process.

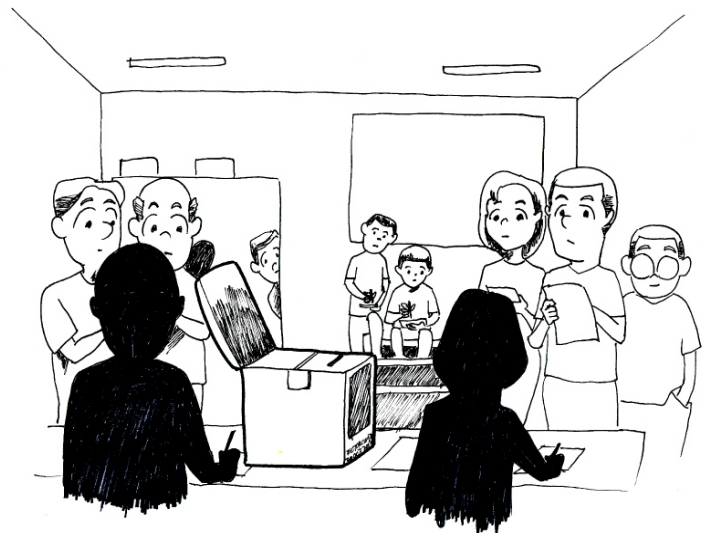
First is the impunity and brazenness of candidates and their supporters in violating election rules. NAMFREL abhors the corruption of voters through rampant vote buying and selling in various forms and the use of violence to settle differences and to exact a win at all cost.

One of the most abused and frequently violated offenses but often tolerated is the unlawful electioneering and the abuse of children. Soliciting votes through the rampant distribution of sample ballots and campaign paraphernalia have been commonplace inside and around the polling place in direct violation of Sec. 261(k) Article XXII of the Omnibus Election Code. More objectionable is the employ of minors and children for these illegal campaigns in direct contravention with Sec. 3(b) of our Constitution; the UN Convention on the Rights of Children; the Child & Youth Welfare Code (PD no. 603); and Republic Act No. 7610 – Special Protection for a Child Against Abuse, Exploitation & Discrimination Act; all of which ensure that children have the right to protection from abuse and exploitation. It is ironic that the Barangay Chairman and its council are some of those mandated and tasked to file a complaint for child abuse and exploitation.

We call on the Comelec to run after these erring candidates, politicians and supporters who blatantly committed these election offenses, and to focus on the issues mentioned like it has strongly focused on illegal and excessive posters and other forms of illegal campaigning. To ignore them diminishes the sanctity of the vote and undermines the election process. The impunity by which they are being committed every election also dares to mock not only the elections as a democratic process but also the Comelec as an institution.

NAMFREL encourages citizens to file sworn statements and affidavits if they have personal knowledge or had experienced vote buying, harassment and coercion. The immediate filing of cases, with the Comelec and local courts, and their eventual prosecution will show these violators that they should not trifle with the ballot or the election.

Second is the confusion and chaos resulting from missing names in the voters list marred the somewhat orderly conduct of the polls. It is incumbent on Comelec to address and resolve this problem with finality by providing an accurate voters list. It should continue to purge the list and fully implement the mandatory biometrics registration law passed early this year to once and for all generate a reliable, accurate & fully accessible voters list.



Thirdly, difficulties were also observed for PWDs, the elderly and pregnant women in exercising their right to vote. To further improve access to the polls and prevent their disenfranchisement, we recommend that public structures, schools and public infrastructure be compliant with the law mandating ease and access to PWDs.

The voters list should also be updated to contain the status of the PWD voter. Comelec has to ensure that special polling precincts are situated at the ground floor of a polling center. Comelec's initiative to set up special polling centers for PWDs and the elderly is commendable. NAMFREL encourages the Comelec to partner with more merchants and mall owners to open more of these special polling centers during elections.

On a positive note, NAMFREL commends the teachers who served as Board of Election Tellers (BET) and the police/military for taking on responsibilities above and beyond their deputized duty, such as the police serving as BETs and poll workers, to make sure that each voter can exercise their right to suffrage and ensure the success of the elections.

With the renewed awareness that the Barangay is the first line of government to deliver basic services, there has been a resurgent public interest and accompanying scrutiny on the barangay officials and their performance. As one of the first acts to establish the trust and confidence with their constituents, NAMFREL would like to remind these newly elected officials (as well as losing candidates) to file and disclose their contributions and expenses incurred during the campaign period. Compliance to the Fair Elections law and campaign finance regulations is a positive step towards Transparency - one of the hallmarks of good governance.

To be consistent with the move to automate Philippine elections and ease the difficulty of conducting a manual election, we recommend to Comelec and various stakeholders to study the feasibility of synchronizing the next Barangay Elections with the 2016 National & Local elections.

### **NAMFREL celebrates its 30th anniversary and inaugurates the Bantay ng Bayan Awards**



In commemoration of its 30th year, the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections held a Thanksgiving Mass on October 26, 2013 at the National Shrine of the Divine Child at La Salle Green Hills in Mandaluyong City, simultaneous with similar prayer services held by NAMFREL chapters in major cities nationwide. Being two days before the barangay elections, the day's activities also served as a Mass/prayer services for the peaceful holding of the polls. The Mass at La Salle Green Hills was officiated by Bishop Ramon B. Villena, D.D. of Bayombong, a NAMFREL pioneer, and was attended by fellow NAMFREL pioneers and volunteers past and present. A traditional NAMFREL Light-A-Candle ceremony was also held, led by current NAMFREL National Chairperson Corazon Dela Paz-Bernardo.

During the event, NAMFREL also gave out the inaugural Bantay ng Bayan Awards. The Award is given to individuals or organizations that embody the values of NAMFREL, recognizing their achievements in electoral reform and good governance advocacy, and who continue to make significant efforts in bringing the same to their own community and/or profession, in the Philippines and/or beyond. Initially, recipients of the Bantay ng Bayan Award are past and present NAMFREL volunteers instrumental in the founding and strengthening of NAMFREL and electoral reform advocacy in the country.

The eight recipients of the 2013 Bantay ng Bayan Awards are:

1. Jose S. Concepcion, Jr. - NAMFREL Founding Chairperson

“For founding the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections thirty years ago; for working to restore the right of the Filipino people to free, clean, and honest elections; for empowering the citizens to demand free, clean, and honest elections so that their true will in the electoral process will prevail; for inspiring the citizens to the fact that achieving free, clean, and honest elections demands vigilance, hard work, and sacrifice; for leading the citizen-volunteers in ensuring free, clean and honest elections, even at great risk to his life and business holdings; and for pioneering the concept of election monitoring that inspired and is now being practiced in 144 countries”



*Cagayan de Oro City*

2. Vicente R. Jayme (posthumous award) - former NAMFREL Vice-Chairperson and Senior Adviser; Bishops-Businessmen's Conference (BBC) Co-Founder; former Asian Development Bank (ADB) Executive Director; former Secretary of Finance

“For helping spearhead a national movement of citizens to ensure honest and fair elections, at a time of great risk; for recognizing the role that business could play in human development and how corporate social responsibility could transform Philippine society -- for people not only to "have more" but "be more"-- leading both businesses and community to action; and for leading an inspiring life dedicated to democracy, responsibility, excellence, and family”

3. Christian S. Monsod - former NAMFREL Secretary General and Chairperson; former COMELEC Chairperson; Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) Founder; current Co-Vice-Chairperson, Bishops-Businessmen's Conference (BBC)

“For helping plant the seeds of and nurture volunteerism in the country in the field of election monitoring; for bringing into public service the cause of free and fair elections by instituting lasting reforms geared towards more transparent elections and a strengthened election commission; and for continuously upholding the spirit of democracy and volunteerism in business and in the law profession”

4. Augusto C. Lagman - former NAMFREL Systems Committee Chairperson; former COMELEC Commissioner; former President, Philippine Computer Society (PCS); Convenor, Movement for Good Governance

“For leading NAMFREL's pioneering Operation Quick Count, the world's first citizen-led parallel national vote count tabulation; for championing the use of technology towards more transparent, accurate, and cost-efficient vote tabulation and consolidation; for actively encouraging cooperation between the private sector, civil society, and the election commission; and for continuously advocating for a more transparent and efficient election process in the Philippines in the interest of strengthening the credibility of the results and the election administration”

5. Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) - NAMFREL-Abra chapter coordinator; citizen watchdog widely recognized for its independent monitoring of local elections, government projects, for advocating environment conservation, for activities related to relief operations, peace and order, capacity-building, good governance, transparency, among many others. In 2005, its Chairperson Pura Sumangil was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as part of the 1000 Peace Women acknowledging their work in peace building all over the world.

“For being a model NAMFREL chapter for three decades; for being ahead of its time in the field of good governance through groundbreaking projects on government service and performance monitoring and other notable development work, in a challenging environment and political climate; for being an inspiring example of

what individuals can do when bound by courage and dedication, effecting change in their communities, and plotting and taking control of their own destiny”

6. Ateneo de Zamboanga University - NAMFREL-Zamboanga City chapter coordinator; training ground for responsible community leaders; through its Social Awareness and Involvement (SACSI) office, leads in organizing and deployment of volunteers during elections and in relief efforts during times of tragedy

“For being a model institution, utilizing academic excellence in the service of the community; for upholding the spirit of volunteerism by regularly mobilizing students and ordinary citizens for ensuring free and fair elections, among other advocacies; and for being a bastion of social awareness and community involvement in a challenging environment”

7. Mariano S. Quesada - former NAMFREL General Coordinator and Secretary General

“For realizing the need and initiating the call for the establishment of a citizen-led advocacy for free elections as the only peaceful means for change; for co-founding the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections, at the risk to business and family; and for his pioneering efforts to share NAMFREL's vision and the Philippine experience in election monitoring to other countries as a capacity-building trainer and election observer”



*Laoag City*

8. Damaso G. Magbual - NAMFREL's current Members Committee Chairman and former NCR Chairperson; Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) Chairperson

He has been a NAMFREL volunteer since 1983, and has served as a resource person, trainer and consultant on election monitoring, electoral systems and administration in more than a dozen countries since 1987. Mr. Magbual is the current Chairperson of the Bangkok-based Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).

“For helping plant the seeds of and nurture volunteerism in the country in the field of election monitoring; for promoting free and fair elections in Asia and beyond; and for inspiring like-minded citizens in other countries to take up the cause that NAMFREL started and form a democracy-centered movement of their own”



*Naga City*

Since 1983, NAMFREL has been bringing together Filipinos of all sectors to work to help revive and sustain democracy in the country by safeguarding the integrity of the vote, and later on also through activities in line with good governance. NAMFREL is the acknowledged world pioneer in the conduct of a citizen-led parallel vote tabulation, known locally as the Operation Quick Count. Internationally, NAMFREL has inspired like-minded organizations to set up their own election monitoring activities in their own countries, with NAMFREL volunteers and officers actively engaging international counterparts to help initiate programs similar to those of NAMFREL in the Philippines.



## **Speech/Homily of His Excellency Most Rev. Ramon B. Villena, D.D. Bishop of Bayombong**

NAMFREL 30th Anniversary Thanksgiving Mass, October 26, 2013

National Shrine of the Divine Child, La Salle Green Hills, Mandaluyong City

Congratulations to NAMFREL, congratulations to us. NAMFREL is not just a name, it is a story, it is history, made up of people abounding in love of GOD and country, with deep commitment, undying spirit of sacrifice, and even fearless martyrdom. We are gathered together to celebrate the 30th founding anniversary of NAMFREL, our anniversary.

The motto and mantra of NAMFREL, "It is better to light a candle, than to curse the darkness" is a recurring refrain that inspires every one of us who have volunteered through the years through thick or thin, in danger and in peace, in abundance and in want and many more.

Remembering the history of NAMFREL, is remembering the story of each of us who have journeyed with the organization since its inception.

Am sure all of us have our own story to tell. Our celebration this afternoon is enriched by our own experiences and stories, told and untold.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of NAMFREL is to tell her story like telling our own.

Please allow me to share with you my short NAMFREL story.

As a young Bishop, I was assigned in Mindanao for more than 3 years. They were the challenging years that made me stronger, more committed and more convinced that we needed then to act and move to liberate us from the many fears that froze us and knots that bound us as a nation, as a people. The atmosphere that prevailed then was cramped and suffocating. There were two kinds of 'air' that prevailed in the atmosphere. One was the seemingly 'free air' that the powers-that-be were inhaling; the other was a 'stale air' that suffocated many of the voiceless, fearful Filipinos.

I am blessed and privileged to serve as an active volunteer, as Diocesan Chair since the beginning. The flame in me has begun when the Citizens National Electoral Assembly (CNEA) was born.

The seed of Filipino patriotism has been planted in every volunteer and up to this day, we remember those who have nurtured this seed with their own blood. We remember our own volunteer in the Diocese of Bayombong, Gerry Tapas, of good memory, of Balence, Dupax del Norte, who was killed during election. He is just one of the NAMFREL heroes we are remembering and dedicating this anniversary. The crucial snap presidential election of 1986 was one defining moment for NAMFREL. The event was the start of the writing of the new leaf in the history of the Philippines.

People and events have stamped the indelible mark of NAMFREL in the Philippines, especially in our politically history.

This was the spark that lighted the candle, the light of Love. The simple light blended with the Light of God, has become a flame of hope for and in our country.

The light that has been started will continue since this light is now inside the heart of each NAMFREL volunteer.

This year, as we celebrate the year of faith, is a fitting blend with the feast we are commemorating today.

Indeed, no one and no amount of trial and challenges can extinguish the light of NAMFREL because it is in confidence with the light of God, the light of FAITH.

May God continue to pour His blessing in each of us. MABUHAY, NAMFREL!

+RAMON B. VILLENA, D.D.  
Bishop, Diocese of Bayombong  
October 26, 2013

## **Homily**

When I was assigned as Auxilliary bishop of Tagum in the 1980's, my passion for justice and peace was awakened. It was there that I was faced with life's realities and struggles of our brothers and sisters. As my memory tells me, it was there that I started to involve myself more passionately to fight for the rights of our

people. It was also in Tagum that I started to be actively involved in the mission and works of the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections or NAMFREL.

During that time, the process of election in Tagum was not that free and peaceful. Just like what is happening still today, politicians were employing all sorts of means just to win the election. Unfortunately, this kind of dirty politics leads to nothing but the sacrifice of precious life and relationships. How can I forget the violent and regrettable death of Ireneo Magbanua? He was a NAMFREL volunteer of San Vicente, Davao del Norte. He was violently killed on account of protecting the sanctity of the ballot.



When I was assigned to the Diocese of Bayombong, I carried with me my advocacy and passion for peace and justice. Every election time, as their bishop and pastor, I commit in my capacity to fight for the sanctity of the will of the people. I always seek the partnership and assistance of the NAMFREL. In my diocese, there are many NAMFREL volunteers who give themselves to protect and guard the votes of the people. There are many who are willing to sacrifice their time, effort and talent for the sake of the ballot. How can I also forget one NAMFREL hero in my diocese whose life he dedicated, all for the sake of the people's vote. His name is Tanas. He is a member of the indigenous tribe in the Municipality of Dupax del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya. His death paved the way to the search and proclamation of truth.

Since my early years as a bishop until now, I believe and continue to support the mission and ministry of the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections. In NAMFREL, I am a witness to countless ordinary citizens who are willing to sacrifice their time and life all for the sake of upholding the will of the people. Yes, I can never forget Rodrigo Ponce, Jaime Alcala, Fructoso Javines, Alexis Parao, and many other martyrs and heroes who are willing to volunteer to die for the sake of this country. We can also never forget all other countless fellow Filipinos who are volunteering to join us in this noble task of protecting our votes every election times. Let us remember, they are volunteers. It means to say,

they are never paid. But in their humble and ordinary means, they offer their lives for the sake of this country and its citizens. Is this not their way of lighting their one little candle. From these heroes, martyrs and many other volunteers, we can never stumble in the dark. We can never curse darkness... but as Filipinos, we light our own little candle to guide us on our way towards peace, justice and prosperity.

As we gather today to celebrate the anniversary of NAMFREL, we remember in a special way all our brothers and sisters who are brave and generous enough to light their candles every election time. We remember our heroes and martyrs. We remember their humility to dedicate themselves freely without expecting for any returns. May their humble death, volunteerism and passion inspire and enflame us to continue to light even just one little candle than to curse the darkness.

Throughout its existence to protect and defend the Filipino people's will, NAMFREL and the many unnamed volunteers teach us all the value of humility. From its beginnings, from the sense of volunteerism, even to its process of securing votes, NAMFREL is propelled and fortified by humility. Because of this, I believe that the good Lord is at our side... He is with us in our noble task and mission. He sustains us to live this long for the good and benefit of our Filipino people. NAMFREL is the mission of every citizen... much more, this is the movement of our poor people. As such, the Lord is with us because as the Psalmist reminds us, "The Lord hears the cry of the poor." NAMFREL will always go along the history of our country as long as there are humble volunteers and supporters like you and I.

As we continue our joyful anniversary celebrations, may the lessons of our gospel and also of NAMFREL keep us rooted in our beginnings. May it enable us to be grounded as we remember all those ordinary Filipinos. May it enable us to be grounded as we remember all those ordinary Filipinos who sacrificed their precious lives for the sanctity of the ballot. May it always keep us humble. As the gospel warns us, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted!" This is best expressed in the motto of NAMFREL: "It is better to light a candle, than to curse the darkness!" It is only in humility that we can truly light our candles... it is only in humility that we can volunteer and commit ourselves to fight for our people's will... it is only in humility that we can truly be exalted in our noble mission and task as defenders of the people's will!

Amen.

## Myanmar election stakeholders dialogue with Philippine counterparts

Members of the Myanmar (Burma) Union Election Commission as well as representatives from civil society were in the country from September 22-27 for a study trip sponsored by IFES Philippines to dialogue with their counterparts and to connect with electoral peers. According to IFES, the activity was also held “to provide the opportunity to understand obstacles and opportunities facing the democratic process in other countries and gain valuable insights into approaches to overcome these obstacles from their peers.



To accomplish this goal, a knowledge-sharing meeting was held on the 26th with members of Philippine election monitoring organizations, the media, and other non-government organizations.

The guests from Myanmar were particularly interested to learn from their Philippine counterparts the procedures and activities pertaining to the code of conduct observed during elections, voters education (specifically about when they are being done), any election rules pertaining to religion, the conduct of by-elections (which the Philippines does not have), and voting for PWDs. The guests were also interested to learn about the Philippine Constitution's provisions on elections, as well as campaign regulations and campaign finance.

On the topic of the election commission working closely with election monitoring groups, NAMFREL council member Damaso Magbual stressed the importance of seeing each other as partners, working together and having regular dialogue, and harmonizing each other's calendar of activities.

In July, Mr. Magbual, as chairman of the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), met with U Tin Aye, Chief Election Commissioner of Myanmar and the rest of the commissioners and election directors to talk about the 2015 elections in Myanmar as well as plans to monitor the process.

### The Cambodian Election

by Damaso G. Magbual, Member, NAMFREL National Council  
Chairperson, Asian network for Free Elections (ANFREL)



*Mr. Magbual in Myanmar*

ANFREL deployed a team of eight experts from six Asian countries headed by this writer, to observe the Parliamentary Elections in Cambodia on July 28, 2013. Our findings were presented to a group of diplomats from the European Union (15 embassies represented) in Bangkok, Thailand, hosted by the Swiss Embassy.

Among the most positive development was the significant decrease in electoral violence compared to past elections. Several interlocutors credited the active participation of Cambodia's youth for much of the more peaceful situation. As one said, “Unlike their elders, they reject violence as a means of resolving conflicts in the electoral process”. It was estimated that the youth represented more than 35% of the registered voters.

### Political Situation

There was a relatively widespread consensus that the country has slid backwards democratically for the past ten years. It has come under a unified control of the ruling party (CPP). Cambodia is now a de facto one-party system that can be credited to the older generation of party leaders having grown up with a Communist/Maoist mindset.

The party's control over all branches of government and democratic institutions has an obvious and undeniably harmful effect on the country's elections.

Among the most compromised institutions, the judicial system has been almost completely undermined and exists primarily as a venue where political connections or financial resources are the sole determinants of the courts' decisions. The courts have been used as a weapon of repression against opposition party leaders, independent voices in the media, amongst many others. Consequently, election stakeholders have no confidence or expectation that the courts can play their proper role in electoral dispute resolution.

### The National Election Committee (NEC)

The NEC has long been a highly politicized body. It is far from exhibiting the independence, impartiality and neutrality expected of an election body. Recommendations by domestic as well as international observers on the recruitment, selection and appointment of NEC Commissioners after each electoral exercise since 1998 have been ignored by the legislature and calls for greater autonomy and professionalism from the NEC have similarly fallen on deaf ears.

### Basic Issues Raised

Problems with the voters' list were the most discussed, studied, and criticized aspect of the NEC's preparation. The inaccuracies of the voters' list created a number of harmful effects, namely, direct disenfranchisement of voters who registered but their names were not in the list; the opportunity for fraud given the incorrect and duplicate names that were found in the list; serious harm on the public's confidence on the legitimacy of the election.

The NEC printed over 2.6 million or 27% excess ballots, a number far exceeding accepted norms and standards in established democracies. No actual justification was given except that the NEC "print ballots in books of 50s and to provide adequate excess ballots to every polling station". Given that the NEC officials are not trusted and the voters' list have excess names, the high number of extra ballots, contributed to an erosion of public trust in the election.

The NEC introduced a notorious invention called "Identification Card for the Election" (ICE). ICEs were issued by the commune leaders to voters with no identification cards to enable them to vote. The issuance of so many ICE cards created a fear of significant fraud since the commune leaders who issued them were mostly partisans of the ruling party.

This election saw the issue of ethnic Vietnamese voters, citizens and non-citizens, become a highly controversial topic. Accusations ran rampant that on election day, groups of Vietnamese were bussed in to vote for the ruling party.

### Media

The media in Cambodia tilts heavily towards the ruling party. All the television stations are government owned, the vast majority of radio stations are government owned and the leading Khmer language daily is owned by one sympathetic to the ruling party. A revealing example of media bias was the coverage surrounding opposition leader Sam Rainsy's return to the country from exile. It was an event wherein thousands of people took to the streets but there was no coverage on TV or in the newspapers.

Most journalists work in an environment of explicit censorship. The Ministry of Information's regulations remain a constant threat of being sued and tried in a biased court system.

### Looking Ahead

Local analysts shared the opinion, before and after the election, that change is forthcoming. The election results where the ruling party lost 22 seats, reinforces the same message. There are a number of social and economic factors that will hasten change.

1. The growing inequality in the distribution of wealth has become more pronounced under the ruling party. It is said that more than half of the population live on less than two dollars a day.
2. The increasing militancy of the youth as expressed in the last election would be a wake-up call to the ruling party that their clamour for change can no longer be ignored.
3. The injustices perpetrated by the ruling elite and condoned by the courts cannot last forever. The issue of land grabs is perhaps the most glaring example though there are many others like the adjudication and resolution of electoral disputes.



4. The issue of ethnic Vietnamese (now Cambodian citizens) as well as the Vietnamese migrant workers whom the Cambodians see as taking away jobs and business opportunities from them, is a very sensitive one that feeds on the emotions of the ethnic Khmers particularly amongst the youth. The general public perceive the government as tolerating their presence and even favouring them.

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