



### **Gun ban extended for special elections in Basilan, Bulacan and Lanao del Sur**

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on November 11 said that the election gun ban will remain in effect for the special election until November 28 in Lanao del Sur, Basilan and the 1st District of Bulacan. The Comelec has established check points in the three provinces and will be pulled out after the lifting of the gun ban. The Philippine National Police (PNP) announced that a total of 940 people were arrested since the implementation of the gun ban but only a total of 120 violators have been charged in court while the others are under investigation. Of the 940 people arrested, 9 are soldiers, 18 are policemen and 31 are government employees. A total of 779 firearms, explosives and bladed weapons were seized during the gun ban. All police units in these areas also mobilized checkpoint operations and police visibility patrols to pre-empt possible outbreak of election-related incidents and to control the movement of persons carrying firearms.

The full enforcement of gun control and restrictions mandated by Comelec Resolution No. 9072 is highly commendable and may have made a dent in the increase of election related violent incidents. Police records in 2007 elections showed that there were 162 election-related violent incidents (ERVI). Of the 162 recorded ERVIs, 44 percent or 72 incidents involved the use of firearms. In that election period, the police nabbed 2,314 people for violating the gun ban and confiscated about 2,000 firearms nationwide. In the 2010 elections including those recorded in the May 10 elections, more than 1000 gun ban violators were arrested. The PNP-DIDM's data in 2008 indicated that there are about 551,046 loose firearms and 559,326 firearms with expired licenses. It is about time that gun control and ownership policies should be revisited and amended. Experience in recent months has shown that the gun ban has been an effective deterrent to politically- motivated and crime related incidents.

### **PCOS machines readied for special Sangguniang Panlalawigan elections**

The Comelec in Basilan conducted on November 10, the testing and sealing of PCOS machines for the forthcoming November 13 special Sangguniang Panlalawigan elections for Districts 1 and 2 in Basilan. On November 12, the Comelec declared a successful the testing and sealing of Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS) machines that will be used for the special elections in Lanao del Sur (Buadiposo Buntong, Kapai, Marantao, Calanogas, Ganassi, Lumbatan, Pagayawan, and Tugaya). Authorities said that police personnel and technicians from Smartmatic will serve as Board of Election Inspectors in the special elections. In Basilan and Lanao del Sur, the May polls were declared a failure because of election-related violence. To be elected in these areas are provincial board members. In Bulacan, the polls were postponed after the Supreme Court dissolved the congressional district for Malolos in January 2010 and returned it to the first district. The special elections will involve a congressional seat.

### **Congress probe over delayed village polls**

The House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms recently conducted a hearing to probe the delays on October 25 polls. Comelec Chairman Jose Melo admitted that the Comelec Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) was delayed in conducting the bid for the ballot papers. However, BAC Chairman Ferdinand Rafanan said that since old members of the BAC were suspended and new members have been appointed only September 7, the BAC was able to complete the bidding on October 6. The National Printing Office (NPO) on the other hand, expressed that they should not be blamed for the delays since they were able to finish printing the ballots in only 22 days instead of the usual 45 days needed in printing the ballot papers. Ximex Delivery Express, Inc. and ZIPP Cargo Corp., forwarding companies contracted by Comelec to deliver the election materials also explained that they should not be blamed for delays since election materials were delivered to them a day before the election. The House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms emphasized that the Comelec should have asked Congress to postpone the elections to iron out glitches rather than the Comelec reporting to the public that they are ready for the October 25 polls.

NAMFREL E- Newsletter Volume 1 Issue No. 30 cited several instances that the Comelec expressed their readiness for the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) elections. However, the Comelec knew a month prior to the election that there were time constraints due to the late composition of the BAC up to the printing of the ballot papers. The delays and moving deadlines in preparation for the Barangay and SK elections (as well as the May 2010 automated elections) is a wakeup call for Comelec to review and improve its management policies and capability to fulfill expectations as an effective election management body.

*[Sources: ABS CBN news, GMA News Comelec Data, US News agency, ANFREL]*