

Freedom for Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's democracy movement, has finally been freed after her seven-year prison term expired Saturday evening, November 13. Suu Kyi had been detained by Burma's military junta for 15 of the last 21 years. Heads of state and Nobel laureates, including the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, joined the Burmese people inside and outside the country in celebrating her release, on which, Suu Kyi claimed, there are no conditions attached. In a statement, President Aquino said that he welcomes her release, but added, "much more must be done for Myanmar to prove it is serious about pursuing its roadmap to democracy. Other political prisoners have not been freed and the recently concluded election has not been viewed as credible."

In a speech she delivered in front of the headquarters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Rangoon a day after her release, she told her supporters, who attended by the thousands, to not give up hope. "There is no reason to lose heart." Suu Kyi called for the release of the more than 2,200 political prisoners still serving sentences, and for unity to advance the democratic cause. "I want to work alongside the people. I don't want to work alone. A one-woman show is not a democracy." "We cannot achieve victory by merely hoping for it. We can achieve victory if and only if we work with courage and determination for what we want. We also need to explore the best path to achieve victory too." In the press conference and interviews that followed, Suu Kyi said "We need people's participation increasingly. By people, I am not referring only to people in our country, but also people of the world. For us to achieve democracy, we will have to establish a network of people—a network of Burmese people, a network of people of the world. Everyone must [be included in the process by] communication means appropriate to the modern era, and work for democracy." She also said she is very happy with the presence of many young people who are seeing her for the first time. Suu Kyi also expressed her desire to have a dialogue with the military junta, and stressed that she bears no grudges against her captors. In a televised interview with the BBC, Aung San Suu Kyi said, "I don't want to see the military falling. I want to see the military rising to dignified heights of professionalism and true patriotism. I think it's quite obvious what the people want; the people just want better lives based on security and on freedom."

Atty. Christian S. Monsod assessment on the Automated Election System

On November 9, former Comelec chairman and current Namfrel National Council member Mr. Christian Monsod presented his assessment of the 2010 automated elections during the Jaime V. Ongpin Foundation Lecture Series. Here are some highlights of his assessment:

On the May 10 elections

- Winners in the President, Vice-President and Senators slate were accurately tracked by surveys and exit polls
- "The number of protests at the Comelec and the House Electoral Tribunal are higher in 2010 than in 2007 – 96 vs.73 in the Comelec and 62 vs.49 in the HET;" "to-date the rules on the recount have still to be agreed upon"
- Low registration rate of overseas workers; "The number registered in 2010 for Filipinos overseas is 589,830 of which only 153, 323 voted. This means that out of at least 3.6 million qualified voters, the turnout rate is at most 4.2%. This is unacceptable because the problem is solvable."
- "The disenfranchisement arising from these three causes (defective voters list; automation procedure; low registration rate of OFWs) is about 5-6 million, which is totally unacceptable"
- "The party-list system is getting out of hand because of a flawed law, flawed Supreme Court decisions and its flawed implementation by the Comelec. The law must be amended and/or the Supreme Court must revisit its decisions."
- Corruption "has been democratized through a patronage and pork barrel system, and even from leakages in the IRA down to the barangay. Only a massive and uncompromising campaign, with the Comelec as a key enforces, can stop this practice."

On the AES

- Favorable sentiments of voters and poll workers on automation - believability of results, ease of shading, speed of counting, early proclamation; "there was general acceptance of the results, especially for the national elections"
- "We need to hear from the IT community when it comes to the technology and the implications of its performance or non-performance. There is more to it than meets the eye."

- "There was agreement that there was a need for a thorough review of the system and for corrective measures if the AES is going to be used again.;" "there was agreement that the PCOS machines should not be purchased"
- The Comelec and Smartmatic did not heed the advise (regarding total transparency and the AES to not become vendor-driven)
- "Speed and not accuracy became the overriding consideration, even if it meant ignoring legal provisions"
- "The source code is clean based on the certification of the AES by the Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) "
- "As of last week, 11,021 CF cards were not yet in the custody of Comelec Central."

On Comelec

- "The Comelec did not start off to be non-transparent in implementing automation"
- "The Comelec has made it difficult to find out in any objective manner the answers to questions raised"
- "It gave up more and more decision-making powers to Smartmatic for lack of organic technical expertise"
- "When the automation schedule seriously faltered, it then waived, ignored or rendered inutile certain legislated safeguards and contractual requirements and de-prioritized other electoral reforms necessary to improve the system itself. When the Comelec ran out of explanations and the questions and criticisms persisted, the Comelec simply shut down communications and thereby heightened the mutual distrust."
- "Lack of enough attention to the details of operations may also be due to the pre-occupation of the Comelec with automation"
- "Special concerns (election violence, disenfranchisement, party-list system, corruption) required longer-term thinking, full staff work and relentless advocacy, which the present Comelec does not appear disposed to do"
- "The first source of disenfranchisement is a defective voters' list. The Comelec solution of incremental registration with biometric registration is correct"
- "The reform of the electoral system should start with the Comelec itself; The first reform is the appointment of new commissioners to implement the intent of the Constitution; The second reform is to stop appointing retired justices to the Comelec; Third is the matter of rationalizing the twin constitutional functions of the Comelec – the management function and the quasi-judicial function"

On Smartmatic

- Automation was "mass-produced," "not pilot-tested satisfactorily," "provided by a supplier who had no extensive experience in the technology"
- "A questionable contract, for example, is the packing and forwarding of ballot boxes and official ballots which cost PhP 1.1 billion and which was not bidded out. It was a negotiated contract with Smartmatic...Comelec itself has years of experience in transporting these items. What is Smartmatic's value-added to this activity?"

On the Random Manual Audit

- "The Random Manual Audit...was a failure"
- "The chair of the TWG-RMA is a statistical illiterate like me and should have realized her limitations;" "she compromised on the use of the RMA for proclamation purposes against her earlier commitment, in the interest of a harmonious relationship with the Comelec"
- "There was no real statistician on the project except NSO Administrator Carmelita Ericta, but she was invited to join the committee very late"
- "The NSO vouches for the correctness of the "edited" results (the raw data had to be edited because of the many mistakes by the teams due mainly to lack of training), but the NSO does not vouch for the adequacy of the sampling design nor the reliability of how the audit was carried out in the field (many were not done at the precinct, nor on election day, nor observed by the parties for lack of notice, nor were all the precincts covered of an already small sample)"
- "The PPCRV parallel count was also useless. It only encoded 53,000 ERs equivalent to a 69% accomplishment rate, the lowest in the history of unofficial parallel counts in the country"
- "Our only verdict on the Smartmatic assurance of a complete auditability of the system is a failing mark at this time"

You may read the assessment report in full by following this link: <http://scr.bi/csV1z4>

[Source: NAMFREL data]

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