

### **Comelec fact- finding committee asked for extensions**

The team tasked to investigate the delays in the delivery of materials used in the October 25 Barangay and a Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) election is asking the Commission on Elections (Comelec) for a three-to-five day extension of its deadline to submit its findings. The team failed to come to a decision on November 17, the last day of the 15-working day period the en banc gave its members to submit their recommendations. The panel requested the extension since it was still in the process of consolidating the sworn documents of witnesses to finalize the report. The five-day extension would enable the task force to focus on writing the report and tie up loose ends if there are any. The report will be submitted to the en banc that will decide on whether or not administrative or criminal charges would be filed for those individuals found responsible to have caused the delays in the delivery of election materials that led to the postponement of elections in more than 2,000 barangays.

The Comelec fact-finding committee was expected to release the final report yesterday, ironically, the said committee also found themselves in the same predicament they were investigating. With this situation, there is a real need for the Comelec to review its procedures and management to rectify and avoid these lapses and delays if the Comelec is to maintain the goodwill it has gained in the conduct of the country's first automated elections. Failing to do so will lead again to further criticisms from concerned citizens and groups questioning their integrity and credibility as country's only election management body. Since there is no choice but to grant such request of extension, the committee has to ensure that the 5- day extension would result to accomplishing their task of a fair and comprehensive investigation report.

### **Madagascar Coup d' etat as Election is Held**

Madagascar's government has called for dialogue with the group of military officers who declared a coup d' etat as elections were being held last Wednesday, November 17. The power grab came on the day of a referendum on a new constitution that could legitimize President Andry Rajoelina's rule. Some of the officers involved were also behind the coup that brought Rajoelina to power in March 2009. Rajoelina has been diplomatically isolated since coming to power and has ignored attempts by African regional mediators to broker a consensus with the opposition and end leadership squabbles. Calls for dialogue and restraint echoed to avoid bloodshed while the nation awaits the results of the referendum. The putsch comes on widespread perception that the new constitution would allow the once popular Rajoelina to stay in power as long as it takes to organize and call for an election. It would also lower the age limit for presidential candidates from 40 to 35 years, allowing the 36-year-old Rajoelina to run. All three opposition groups called for a boycott of the elections. The rejection of a new constitution is seen as a chance by the opposition to challenge Rajoelina's stay in his post while an approval would add legitimacy to his ascension to power last year.

NAMFREL has been invited by Madagascar's UN Mission through the Department of Foreign Affairs to send election observers to the November 17, 2010 Constitutional Referendum and December 20, 2010 Municipal Elections.

### **NAMFREL Shares its Philippine Election Automation Experience in an International Conference on Election Observation**

As part of NAMFREL's initiative to share the Philippines experience on election automation with the rest of the world, NAMFREL Executive Committee and National Council Member Damaso G. Magbual presented two lectures on the "5th Meeting on the Implementation of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation" held in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. on October 12-14, 2010. Delegates and participants of the conference sponsored by the Carter Center came from the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth Secretariat, Council of Europe-Parliamentary Assembly, Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), International IDEA, International Parliamentary Union (IPU), International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), Organization of American States (OAS), UN OSCE/ODIHR, and the UN Secretariat.

His first lecture was on the "Challenges of Observing the Automated Elections in the Philippines". The main talking points emanated from Principle 12 of the Declaration of Principles which spoke of the ..."unimpeded access to all stages of the election process and all election technologies and the certification processes for electronic voting and other technologies, ...". The lack of transparency of the COMELEC, the confused roles, accountabilities and responsibilities of the technology provider (Smartmatic) and the COMELEC, the removal of the necessary safeguards and the indifference of the COMELEC on the Random Manual Audit were some of the main assessments and conclusions shared by Mr. Magbual.

The meeting devoted one session on the Philippine experience also presented Mr. Bill Sweeney, President of IFES. Mr Sweeney was in the Philippines to observe during the last May 2010 election had a similar assessment in the conduct of the recent elections. Mr. Magbual's second lecture discussed the "Importance of a Code of Conduct for Election Observers". Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter gave the keynote address as well as the closing remarks during the conference.

[Source: Manila Standard Today, NAMFREL data]