

You can deny us, *but you can't make us go away.*

For as long as the people seek truly free and fair elections, the light of NAMFREL shall burn brightly.

Last week, the COMELEC unanimously decided to deny NAMFREL, in partnership with the CBCP-NASSA, accreditation for the May 10, 2010 elections. This means that NAMFREL/CBCP-NASSA will not be entitled to its own copy of the election returns normally used for a parallel count, nor will it be able to officially observe the random manual precinct audit to validate the electronic results.

The May 10 elections will be the first automated polls in the country's history. But up to now, the capabilities of the new system have not been fully established. People are understandably nervous that many things could go wrong or that it would simply facilitate wholesale cheating.

NAMFREL has watched over 25 national and local elections. More than 500,000 volunteers have given their time, energy, and even their lives, to preserve the sanctity of the ballot. NAMFREL has gloried in its achievements, but it has also learned from its mistakes. NAMFREL is now a model for election monitoring in over 32 countries, and it has earned a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

To deny NAMFREL accreditation because two of its officials are allegedly "partisan" (with "partisanship" defined as being critical of the administration) is to insult the integrity and patriotism of its 500,000 volunteers—the youth, professionals, businessmen, religious, peasants, urban poor, labor—who come together during elections, set aside their personal preferences and unite in one goal: the conduct of free and fair elections.

Why doesn't the COMELEC welcome the services of an experienced organization whose vigilance helps validate the results of the elections?

True, the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) has already been accredited. With the pervasive doubts lingering about a totally new untested system, isn't it to the advantage of COMELEC to have more than one watchdog, as it has done in the past? A watchdog that is ecumenical, broad-based and experienced in observing, monitoring and assisting in elections would help make this exercise much more credible.

NAMFREL volunteers know how important it is to be a real CITIZENS' watchdog, even if it means watching the COMELEC itself, if necessary. The COMELEC during the Marcos, Aquino, Ramos and Arroyo administrations all respected that role and accredited NAMFREL. The Melo COMELEC is the exception.

NAMFREL is bigger than any of the individuals that comprise it. It is bigger than the politics, excuses and officiousness of the powerful. Come the 2010 elections, the NAMFREL volunteers will reunite, and together with CBCP-NASSA and other electoral watchdogs, mobilize our countrymen to vigilance once more.

You cannot kill the NAMFREL spirit.



"To my mind leaving out NAMFREL—which has gained expertise through the decades it worked since 1983 to ensure that elections are transparent and credible—will only work to the disadvantage of the COMELEC and the credibility of the elections in general."
-Sec. Gilbert Teodoro

"One of the pillars of a true democracy is clean and honest elections. Clean elections in turn depends on the vigilance of non-partisan groups who will ensure that votes are counted properly. Learning from past experience and mistakes, NAMFREL overall has shown a renewed capacity to safeguard the votes of the Filipino people."

COMELEC should accredit NAMFREL as one of the official monitoring organizations for voters."

-Nicanor Perlas

"NAMFREL must be accredited by the COMELEC in this new era of automated elections. It has earned its accreditation from the people."

-Sen. Dick Gordon

"Considering its track record and expertise in previous elections, NAMFREL-NASSA-CBCP is well-qualified to discharge the duties of an accredited citizens' arm to conduct a nationwide unofficial count for dissemination to the public."

-Sen. Noynoy Aquino

