



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL) 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. ###