



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

Room 601, DMG Center, Domingo M. Guevara St.,
Barangay Mauway, Mandaluyong City 1550
Philippines

Telefax: +63 (2) 470-4151
Wireless Landline: +63 (2) 736-0969; 788-3484
Telephone: +63 (2) 451-1586
Mobile No.: +63 939.1102872; 927.2443781
E-Mail: secretariat@namfrel.com.ph
Website: www.namfrel.org.ph

Press Statement

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Preliminary Findings and Observations on the May 13, 2019 Midterm Elections

General Statements

The unfortunate thing about the multiple mishaps in the May 13 elections is that the problems were preventable. We refer to problems about non-distribution of the VIS, unusable VRVMs, malfunctioned VCMs, defective SD cards, bleeding of marker pens. This was the 4th time that COMELEC ran the Automated Election System. Budget allocation for Philippine elections is always adequate. The commission has a full staff complement from the level of commissioners to Election Officers at the municipal level. The preparations are guided by an Election Calendar. As the young people would say, "Anyare?"

Peace and Order

This is a bright spot because election-related violence and intimidation went down as reported by the PNP, albeit with extreme incidents like bombing in Cotabato City and Datu Odin Sinsuat Maguindanao.

Vote buying

This is a scourge that has crept into Philippine elections. This has made the ballot more of a commodity than the expression of the will of the voters to choose their leaders. PNP reports that it has arrested about 300-500 offenders considering that the Task Force Kontra Bigay was launched one week before the elections.

Voters Information Sheet

The VIS is a ballot-like sheet of paper that COMELEC is required to send to every one of the 61,843,750 registered voters at least a month before election day, to advise them about their voting center and precinct number. The VIS is both a guide to voters on where to go on election day, and a voters information material. Unfortunately, this was not distributed to voters allegedly because of printing error committed by the printer (*Although the COMELEC should disclose who the printer was*). COMELEC spent Php 247,375,000 which went to waste. A question that begs an answer is, who committed the printing error? The industry practice is that the printer gets the final approval of the client before it proceeds with the final printing. The non-distribution of the VIS is the least of the COMELEC's inadequacies in this election. It has not distributed the VIS nationwide in the past elections anyway.

Voting Center Management

As in past elections, the EB and how it handled elections at the precinct was satisfactory. The EB worked between 14 and 18 hours, from opening of precinct to indorsing of records and paraphernalia to the Office of the Treasurer. For some precincts that encountered machine malfunctions, some EBs served beyond 18 hours. News videos on election day showed the EBs performing an additional task they had not done before, i.e., assuaging impatient voters to understand the situation why voting was stalled. The Voters' Assistance Desks set up helped a lot in directing voters to their right precincts. Fortunately, certain schools had a floor layout of the Voting Center and the precinct assignment.

Signage and Directional Signs

NAMFREL chapters reported that signage and directional signs were posted in various polling centers.

EAPP

The introduction of the Emergency Accessible Polling Place (EAPP) is another bright spot in this election. This is a room at the first floor of the voting center where the PWDs, senior citizens, and obviously pregnant women were able to cast their vote.

Machines Malfunction

Long queues were developed in precincts where VCM, and/or VRVM and SD cards were corrupted, voters getting discouraged, thus resulting to voters disenfranchisement.

Readiness of EBs and Technical Support

Despite the training program for the EB, there were still some who were not familiar with the guidelines and were not able to respond to particular incidents.

Bleed through

The low quality of Ballot Paper and/or Marking pens caused bleed-through as voters were marking their ballot. It may have caused some machines to malfunction because the ink took some time to dry. The problems encountered in the local voting should not have come as a surprise to the COMELEC since these problems manifested themselves in the Overseas Absentee Voting which started a month before the elections.

Procurement of Supplies

The COMELEC cannot simply take refuge by citing the procurement law, when it went for the lowest bid, as an excuse for the low quality election paraphernalia. It should have gone for the "Lowest Calculated Responsive Bid."

The May 13, 2019 Midterm Elections is the fourth time that the automated elections systems was used. For all these problems, the COMELEC should be held responsible. ###