



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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Namfrel position supporting the holding of Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan polls as scheduled on May 14, 2018

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections, the organization that started nonpartisan citizen monitoring of elections in the world in 1983, urges Congress to no longer postpone the holding of the two polls. The Commission on Elections announced that these polls are scheduled on May 14, 2018, and preparations are underway for holding them in over 42,000 villages throughout the country.

“Free and fair elections are a precondition of democracy and they promote social, political and economic development”, according to the Bali Declaration by the Asian Network for Free Elections, of which Namfrel is a founding member. Having regular elections is an exercise of and in democracy and the current set of *barangay* officials, who have been in office since 2016, would need a fresh mandate from the people they serve. In a truly functioning democracy, regularly renewing the mandate of elected officials is an exercise of good governance.

Barangay elections

In a survey among Namfrel provincial and NCR-level chairpersons, many expressed that it is high time for voters to judge the performance of the *barangay* officials and to replace erring ones via the ballot. Postponing the elections, which Congress has twice done already, “brings about a sense of caution and instability” among the village officials.

Those surveyed coming from Mindanao rated most municipalities in their respective provinces as safe to hold elections; and martial law, which is currently in place, do not seem to be an obstacle in holding the polls.

Namfrel cautions that despite the supposedly non-partisan nature of the *barangay* polls, mayors and other influential political personalities have pre-chosen or preferred candidates, making it difficult or almost impossible for anyone to contest against them and still hope to win.

Owing to dislocation of residents and the already stressed situation in Marawi city, Namfrel supports the position of the COMELEC to delay holding elections. The organization is very pleased with the approach that COMELEC has taken, which is to assess the situation on the feasibility of holding polls in the city within the next three months.

The war on drugs waged by the government and the allegation that 40 percent of village officials are involved in drugs are destabilizing factors. It has painted all the village officials to a corner where they are forced to draw a list of residents within their *barangay* who are suspected of involvement in drugs. They get the ire of the residents (voters) for forcing to come up with a list, on the one hand, and being tagged by the government as one among the 40 percent, on the other hand.#