



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS RELEASE - NAMFREL as accredited citizens arm bats for an audit and transparency for a credible 2019 elections

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections has been accredited to serve as citizens' arm of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) for the coming May 13, 2019 elections. In Minute Resolution No. 19-0351 dated March 29, 2019, the Commission En Banc resolved to accredit NAMFREL as a civil society participant in the Random Manual Audit (RMA), obtain the 27th copy of the Election Returns generated by the Vote Counting Machines (VCM) and address other matters requested in the petition for accreditation such as the Open Election Data project.

NAMFREL filed its petition on December 5, 2018 and presented bona fides orally in an en banc session of the Commissioners on January 15, 2019.

Aiming for a quick and correct count, automating the election process was thought as a solution. However, the dearth in information and data from the process of the three automated elections result in an inconclusive finding in assessing the accuracy of the results and performance of the AES process. Despite automating the electoral process, the number of electoral protests at the local level increased compared with the manual election system. Below par election results transmission rates and questions on the accuracy of the vote counting machines has raised some concerns on the election results casting doubt on the legitimacy on the proclaimed winner.

To improve and build confidence in the election system, various safeguards mandated by law and fixes to the vulnerabilities has been identified and recommended by the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on the Automated Election System, the Comelec Advisory Council, Election Observers and Industry and Technology experts.

Despite multiple efforts by various groups to monitor the conduct and results of the past elections, lack of transparency and gaps in coverage has resulted in an unconvincing assessment of the past elections.

NAMFREL Initiatives to secure the integrity of the 2019 Elections

To address these gaps, NAMFREL has identified three very important activities to secure the integrity of the process that would contribute to the credibility of the

forthcoming elections. Among the flagship projects that NAMFREL informed the COMELEC it will focus on, in its petition for accreditation are:

1. Monitoring the processes and schedules of the Automated Election System (from procurement to delivery of machines to performance of the VCM and the transmission and canvassing of election results during Election Day);
2. Designing and maintaining an Open Election Data website (aimed to increase the transparency of the results). Election related data obtained will be analyzed and used to detect fraud;
3. Supporting the Random Manual Audit or the RMA (observing the team which will do manual examination of the ballots to validate the machine count); and
4. other conventional poll watch activities.

The granting of accreditation to embark on these election monitoring activities is consistent with Article 18 of the December 2012 Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections, where COMELEC is a signatory.

The provision on engagement of election observers in said Declaration state:

1. Transparency is a hallmark of truly democratic elections. Domestic and international election observers can enhance the credibility and legitimacy of an election. Well-trained, dedicated and non-partisan election observers are a key tool for promoting the quality and integrity of the entire electoral process, and accreditation allows them to function more effectively.

EMBs, subject to their prevailing laws, should ensure that all well-trained and non-partisan observer groups are permitted to observe all stages of election processes including observing the entire polling and counting processes at any polling station.

2. When accreditation is given inconsistently or only at the last minute, it is difficult for election observation groups to properly conduct the complex planning required for a mission to observe the pre-election process as well as the election day and post-election activities. EMBs should set out clear rules for timely accreditation of domestic and international observers and apply them fairly and consistently.

Even prior to its accreditation, NAMFREL volunteers nationwide have been conducting pre-election day activities, which included the review of the computerized voter list, voters' education, observation of the testing of the automated voting machines, and the mock elections.

But while our volunteers have the experience and expertise in all the above activities, they would however need enough financial resources to carry them out in a more thorough and effective manner.

With elections less than three weeks away, NAMFREL is again seeking support to carry out the tasks of mobilizing some 50,000 volunteers to monitor the election activities in 85,768 clustered precincts during the election period, and most especially those on election day.

NAMFREL is the first citizens' led election monitoring organization in the world and the pioneer in parallel vote tabulation (known as Operation Quick Count) now being practiced by monitoring bodies throughout the world. Its volunteers continue to serve as international election observers in elections across the world. The granting of full accreditation based on the petition filed with the Commission En Banc will enhance NAMFREL's performance to effectively accomplish its self-mandated tasks in the service of free, fair, clean and honest elections. #