



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS STATEMENT

September 25, 2019

Postponing the May 2020 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE) remains inadequately justified, and will extend terms of office without voters' consent

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) reiterates its position that the May 2020 Barangay and SK Elections be held as scheduled.

Moving the date of the BSKE:

- Contravenes the principle of regularity in the conduct of an election;
- Extends the terms of elected officials without a fresh mandate from the electorate;
- Deprives the electorate of seeking accountability from elected officials through the ballot.

Periodic elections are an institutionalized governance feature in countries that have chosen democracy as their form of government. The Philippines has an obligation under international law to conduct periodic and genuine elections, as articulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Further, the ICCPR stipulates that every citizen must be provided the right and opportunity...to "vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections." Thus, the regularity of elections is important to establish the mandate, legitimacy and moral authority of elected leaders. Not holding elections regularly could undermine the democratic process of ensuring the citizens' right to choose their leaders and make them accountable.

On postponing BSKE to save Php5 billion to Php6 billion: Recent reports said that the country loses Php700 Billion annually due to corruption, P50 Billion annually due to illegal wildlife trade, Php 105.7 Billion annually due to road crashes, and Php3.5 Billion *daily* due to traffic congestion in NCR alone, among others. These reports indicate that the government can source enough funds by addressing several key issues. Why do so at the expense of a Constitution-mandated process?

On postponing BSKE due to election fatigue and not having enough time to prepare: The May 2020 BSKE comes a full year after the May 2019 elections. Preparations for a manual election is not as complex and as time-pressured as that of an automated one. The Comelec has acknowledged that they are implementing the 2020 BSKE calendar and are in the thick of preparations (ie. voter registration, outreach to IPs, voters' education, etc.). Comelec's request is just to not conduct the BSKE at the same time or less than a year before or after national elections.

On postponing BSKE because terms of office will be cut short: When the sitting barangay and SK officials filed for their candidacy for the May 2018 BSKE, they were fully aware of and accepted a shortened term, itself brought on by a previous postponement of BSKE. NAMFREL believes that, instead of length of term, a major determinant of success besides qualified and committed elected local officials is the existence and proper execution of concrete plans for the barangay, guided by established guidelines and implementing rules and regulations. In the absence of these, no amount of term extensions would ensure accomplishment of expectations and deliverables. If they do a good job in their shortened term, let their constituents judge them through the election.

Moreover, moving the date of elections set by law can only be justified when any of the conditions mentioned in Section 5 of the Philippine Omnibus Election Code exist: any serious cause such as violence, terrorism, loss or destruction of election paraphernalia or records, force majeure, and other analogous causes of such a nature that the holding of a free, orderly and honest election should become impossible in any political subdivision. It is the task of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to make such determination, which in turn should be through public hearings. None of these conditions exist, and no such consultations with the voting public ever took place. ###