



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS STATEMENT

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A safer registration process

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) welcomes the decision of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to resume the registration of voters for the 2022 elections on September 1 nationwide, except in areas under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) or Modified ECQ. NAMFREL also commends the COMELEC for taking steps to implement anti-COVID precautions, like preventing symptomatic applicants from entering Comelec premises, ensuring physical distancing, requiring applicants to wear face masks and face shields, and encouraging applicants to bring their own pens.

In a press release on August 15, the Comelec said that they are "encouraging applicants to download the application forms from www.comelec.gov.ph," and "strongly recommended that downloaded forms be filled out before going to the COMELEC office for registration." NAMFREL believes that the COMELEC could improve the upcoming registration process by implementing elements of their previous iRehistro system, previously offered to OFWs, and expanding them nationwide.

Online submission of requirements

NAMFREL believes that Comelec could take the anti-COVID precautions further by making it a requirement to download and accomplish the forms, and for the applicants to bring their own writing materials, instead of being merely recommendations. The Comelec could also take the precautions even further, by exploring the possibility of digitally transforming the registration process, by allowing a voter registrant, using any electronic device like a laptop, tablet, or smartphone, to fill out a registration form online and submit the same electronically to the Comelec.

Appointment system

To further prevent the crowding of people at Comelec offices, NAMFREL further urges the COMELEC to implement an online appointment system during the submission of requirements. As has been observed in previous registration activities at the Comelec offices or even in satellite registration locations, the Comelec can only accept a finite number of applications a day. An appointment system will help ensure that registrants would come to their respective Comelec offices only on the appointed day and time that they can be served. An online appointment system would not be new to Filipinos, as this is the kind of system being used in securing appointments for processing of passports and NBI clearances, among others.

NAMFREL is currently drafting a set of further recommendations for lawmakers and election administrators to help ensure that Filipinos are amply protected every step of the way as the country enters another election cycle.

The upcoming resumption of the registration of voters will be an important indicator of how the Comelec would handle the holding of the 2022 elections amidst a pandemic. NAMFREL remains hopeful that starting with the registration, the Comelec would adopt processes that are efficient, cost effective, and have the utmost safety of Filipinos in mind, to invite confidence from the public and from polling staff that they would not be exposed to infection if they go out to vote or do their poll duties in 2022. ###