

## Less than 8 months to go before the 2013 elections

### Filing of COCs

All prospective candidates for the May 2013 national and local elections only have this week (October 1 to 5, 8am to 5pm) to file their Certificates of Candidacy (COCs). According to [Comelec Resolution no. 9518](#) released on September 12, all registered political parties are also to submit to the Commission on Election's (Comelec) Law Department the names and specimen signatures of their official party nominees not later than October 1. As in past elections, any person who holds a public appointed office or position shall be considered resigned from office once he/she files the COC. Substitutions and withdrawals will be entertained by the Comelec only until December 21, after which the list of candidates will be finalized and be used to configure the ballots.

Voting registration is suspended from October 1-5, and will resume on October 6.

### PCOS machines

Along with the facilitation of the filing of COCs, the poll body is prepping up as well the technology that will be used in the elections next year. On July 24 and 25, 2012, the House of Representatives' Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms conducted a mock Random Manual Audit (RMA) to assess the accuracy of the Smartmatic-TIM's Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS) machines. The Comelec allowed the committee to conduct the test to allay the apprehension of people that the machines are inaccurate, as what certain IT groups were pointing out.



One IT group, [transparentelections.org](http://transparentelections.org), claims that in the mock elections/RMA held at the House

Committee on Suffrage, the PCOS just had 97.215% accurate as opposed to the 99.995% accuracy as required by the contract. Smartmatic, however, contested that the people who were auditing the machines committed the mistakes and not the machines. The Comelec on the other hand gave assurance to the public that further tests will be conducted on the PCOS machines to prepare them for the elections next year.

The Comelec is also currently in the thick of its procurement activities for the 2013 elections through its Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC). Among the items lined up for purchase are the CF cards and external rechargeable batteries that will be used with the PCOS machines. Also in the list of consulting services to be procured by the commission is the source code review. The poll body awarded the contract for source code review to SLI Global Solutions, the same company that provided the same service to Comelec in the 2010 elections, in the amount of Php 41,331,213.00. The procurement of this service did not go through the process of public bidding, which is a deviation from the standard procurement method that government offices should follow per the Procurement Law (RA No. 9184), especially if the budget involved is more than Php 500,000.00.

Further reading:

[Smartmatic audit report of the July 24-25, 2012 Mock Elections presented on September 5 to the House Committee on Suffrage & Electoral Reform](http://bit.ly/P75YsT) (<http://bit.ly/P75YsT>)

[A Review/ Analysis made by TransparentElections.org / CSOs/ IT groups of Smartmatic-TIM Corp.'s "Mock Elections Summary Report" on the Mock Elections conducted on July 24-25, 2012](http://bit.ly/OmWm0x) (<http://bit.ly/OmWm0x>)

[Comelec Resolution No. 9521](http://bit.ly/PRKT6s) – In which the Comelec re-acquires the services of SLI Global Solutions for PCOS source code and documentation review, upon recommendation of Comelec executive director Jose Tolentino (<http://bit.ly/PRKT6s>)

### Cleansing of voters' lists

Comelec chairperson Sixto Brilliantes, Jr. has given assurance that there is enough time to rid the voters' lists of multiple or ghost registrants in time for the May 2013 synchronized national, local and Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) elections. His response came amidst concerns that the Comelec might not be able to cleanse the list, especially in the ARMM, as the Election Registration Board (ERB) hearings had been postponed and rescheduled. The new ERB hearing schedules would follow after the names of registration applicants in the ARMM had undergone the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) process, which would cross-match the biometric registrations of voters to eliminate double and multiple registrants. The Voter's Registration Act of 1996 gives authority only to the ERB to approve or disapprove registration applications. The Comelec estimates that they will be able to remove about 300,000 names in the ARMM voters list after undergoing the process.

In a Congressional hearing in early September, Chairman Brilliantes said that 9 million of the 52 million registered voters have yet to submit to biometrics data capture, using fingerprints, photographs, and signature of voters. He called for the passing of a law that would make biometrics capture of all registered voters mandatory, "to allow a thorough cleansing of the national voters' registry."

## Overseas Filipino voters

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Comelec have said that the number of new registrants among overseas Filipinos have surpassed 2009 figures. As of early September, the DFA has managed to register more than 850,000; in contrast there were only close to 590,000 registrants for the 2010 elections. The Comelec had earlier said that the target of registering 1 million overseas Filipinos might not be possible, but with registration to continue until October 31, the target could be achieved or surpassed.

The DFA attribute the surge in number to social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter that are being utilized by Filipino media outlets and other organizations to encourage Filipinos abroad to register. In Israel for example, where the Philippine embassy has registered the highest number of overseas voters for the past three elections, mass text messaging is being utilized to reach out to potential registrants, in partnership with an Israeli telecom network. Field registration has also been carried out in Israel, Malaysia, New Zealand, and other countries, conducted in places frequented by Filipinos as well as during special events organized and attended by Filipinos, like concerts.

Organizations like Migrante International have urged Filipinos abroad to exercise their right of suffrage. "We still believe that Filipinos abroad, as absentee voters, could be a potent swing vote that could win a nationally elected position," said Migrante in a statement. However, the number of overseas Filipinos who register and actually vote remain extremely low. According to Comelec, of the 590,000 million Filipinos overseas registered for the 2010 election, only 152,000 of this number actually voted. There are more than 8.5 million potential Filipino voters overseas.

The Comelec hopes that pending bills to make it easier for Filipinos abroad to vote -- like through the internet -- would be passed in time for the 2013 election. Under Republic Act 9189 or the Overseas Absentee Voting Act, for example, qualified and registered Filipinos abroad are required to physically show up in their respective embassies and consulates. Filipinos overseas have complained that it is time consuming and often difficult to leave work for a day just to be able to register and vote, as their places of work are usually far from where the embassy is located, not to mention the resulting loss of income if they exercise their right of suffrage.

(Various sources, Commission on Filipinos Overseas)

## **Comelec disqualifies party list groups**

After a review by its First and Second Divisions to eliminate dubious groups organized by politicians and influential families, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) disqualified last week 17 organizations that sought to be accredited to participate in next year's party list elections. The organizations deemed not qualified for not meeting the standards for Party List groups set forth by the Constitution and the Party List Act are the following: Addicts and Alcoholics Carrying the Message Association, the Asosasyon ng Mangangalakal (Askal), United Philippine Transport Tricycle, Trisikad, Habal-Habal Operators and Drivers Association, 1-Aangat Ka Pinoy, Isa Akong Magsasaka Foundation, Aksyon Mahirap, Aniban ng Magtutubig ng Pilipinas, Aurora Integrated Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Ang Nagkakaisang Alay sa Bayan ng Maka-Diyos at Makabayang Nangangalakal, Sararong Bicolnon, Ako at ang Basura Movement, Alliance for Democracy and Morality-Bantay Pasahero, National Crusaders for Peace and Democracy, Mindanao Allied Forces, Vendors Aggrupation, Philippine Banana Pioneer Foundation Inc. and Bangon Mangingisda.

There were 289 groups that originally sought accreditation, 165 of which are new, according to the Comelec. According to Comelec chairperson Sixto Brillantes, Jr., they are aware that many of the groups were organized by wealthy and powerful people who handpicked nominees who were former government officials or members of political clans. The Comelec recently passed a resolution authorizing a review of the party list groups, to disqualify those not representing marginalized and underrepresented sectors as set forth by law, namely: labor, peasant, fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, elderly, handicapped, women, youth, veterans, overseas workers, and professionals.

To help cleanse the list of party list hopefuls, election watchdog Kontra Daya has compiled a database of dubious party list organizations and submitted it to the Comelec, and which the Comelec uses as one of its guides in reviewing the eligibility of the applicants. Kontra Daya's list includes Ang Kasangga Party-list, whose representative, the watchdog says, is the owner of several businesses and is one of the richest in the House of Representatives. Another group, Ang Mata'y Alagaan (AMA), which claims to represent blind people and those affected with all kinds of eye diseases and disorders, have Supreme Court Associate Justice Presbitero Velasco's wife and daughter as nominees. In August, several petitioners wrote the Comelec asking for the disqualification of winning Party-List group Citizens' Battle Against Corruption (Cibac), claiming that all their four nominees for the 2013 polls are either personally connected to former presidential candidate / televangelist Eddie Villanueva, or are members of Villanueva's Jesus Is Lord Movement. Villanueva's son Emmanuel Joel Villanueva is now Secretary of TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Authority) and recently abandoned his plan to run for the Senate in 2013.

Apart from Kontra Daya's database and the nominees, the Comelec said they also look at track record, history, membership, and source of organization funding to determine the eligibility of the party list applicants. For groups that have sitting nominees in the House of Representatives, the Comelec also check their projects, the bills that they authored and how they spent their pork barrel.

The disqualified groups may appeal their rejection, according to the Comelec. The Comelec targets the second week of October for the release of the list of qualified party list groups after review and deliberations.

(Sources: PDI and Rappler)

#### **Important dates to remember**

**October 1 to 5, 2012:** Schedule of filing of Certificates of Candidacy for all elective positions; voters' registration suspended

**October 6, 2012:** Resumption of voters' registration

**October 15, 2012:** Constitution of the Random Manual Audit Committee to draft the rules

**October 15, 2012:** Last day for overseas voters to file application for transfer of registration records from the overseas registry to the local registry

**October 31, 2012:** Last day for local voters to file applications for registration, transfer of records, reactivation and correction of entries; deadline for overseas Filipinos to file applications for registration or certification as overseas voters

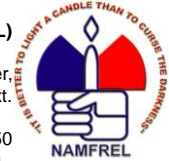
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