



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

Room 601, DMG Center, 52 Libertad corner Calbayog
St., Mandaluyong City
Philippines

Telephone: +63 (2) 484-7590; 571-9943
Telefax: +63 (2) 470-4151
E-Mail: secretariat@namfrel.com.ph
Website: www.namfrel.com.ph

PRESS RELEASE 28 April 2010

NAMFREL WARNS THAT PUBLIC WILL NOT KNOW HOW PCOS MACHINES COUNT THEIR VOTES PCOS machines will not give receipts; thus parallel validation run needed

The National Citizens Movement for Free Elections stated today that voters will not know for sure if the PCOS machines used in the COMELEC's Automated Election System will count their votes correctly because the machines will not issue a receipt indicating a person's vote nor display on the machines' screen how that voter voted. All the machine will indicate is a "congratulatory" message to the voter that his or her ballot has been accepted by the machine. The PCOS machines will not be indicating if any of a person's votes are valid or not.

Because machines have not been publicly tested nor their source codes released for public review, NAMFREL has joined information technology professionals, business groups such as the Makati Business Club, Management Association of the Philippines, and Financial Executive Institute of the Philippines, legal group Philippine Bar Association, and former COMELEC Chairman Christian Monsod in urging the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to hold a parallel verification run of all ballots against the election returns on May 10. This parallel run of ballots, where only the three positions of President, Vice President, and one local government official (e.g., Mayor) will be counted, will not replace the Automated Election System and the PCOS machines but rather simply crosscheck and validate the accuracy of automated counts. Above all, it will ensure the credibility and transparency of the upcoming elections and assure voters that their ballots are counted correctly by the machines.

If the parallel or verification run spots less than eight errors in counting the votes for these three positions (which indicates a less than one percent random machine error), then the automated count can proceed. However, if the manual count spots more than eight errors, this means that additional inconsistencies may exist in other positions—which would then call for a full manual recounting of ballots for that particular precinct before any transmission of data can take place. According to the COMELEC's contract specifications with Smartmatic, the PCOS machines are supposed to have an error margin of only 0.005 percent. This, however, has not been publicly demonstrated for all machines.

NAMFREL Chairman Jose L. Cuisia said that the practice of parallel verification runs were common among all companies who participate in large-scale automation processes for the first time. NAMFREL officials also pointed out that in other common automated transactions such as those with automated teller machines (ATMs), credit cards, and even mobile phone loads, individuals are able to review their transactions through paper receipts or screen displays. The PCOS system offer neither for such an important act as a vote.

Without a full trial run of its automated system, the COMELEC can strengthen the public's confidence in the PCOS machines, establish reliable results, and in the end increase credibility of the electoral exercise as a whole by engaging in the parallel verification run.

Based on estimates by IT professionals and lawyers, the parallel verification run would last from one to five hours depending on the number of voters in a precinct and could be carried out by Boards of Election Inspectors (BEIs). Additional costs would amount to some P500 million, covering the BEIs overtime pay plus the printing of additional forms. Since the COMELEC is already printing manual forms for 30% of all precincts, IT professionals recommend printing forms for all precincts for this verification run. The COMELEC has funds for this.

Additionally, NAMFREL has called for the release of the final guidelines for the Random Manual Audit (RMA) of the PCOS machines and AES as required by law. The guidelines have been left pending by the COMELEC's technical committee on RMA headed by PPCRV Chairman Tita de Villa, who is neither an IT expert, statistician, nor auditor and thus may not be qualified to design a proper audit plan. The audit plan has been pending for months.

NAMFREL recommends the following features for a Random Manual Audit :

- A stratified risk-based random sampling technique to be conducted by a reputable statistical institute or polling agency. The sampling must take into account political 'hot spots' or precincts deemed to be at higher risk compared to others;

- A statistically valid sample size must be used in order to extrapolate results that are at a confidence level of 95 percent or above;
- The selection of precincts must be done just one to two hours prior to the end of voting at 6:00 pm, in order to limit the risk of tampering with PCOS machines that are not included in the manual audit;
- Only the Board of Election Inspectors from another precinct shall conduct the RMA. The same procedures must be followed in conducting a manual election count;
- The RMA should be conducted right at the same precinct, to ensure that ballot boxes are safe from being snatched and/or tampered with;
- The manual counting of ballots must be subject to the same criteria as those set for the PCOS machines (e.g., accept shading of 50 percent and reject those that are less), allowing the RMA to simply test the accuracy and reliability of the automated system given the agreed precision levels; and
- The RMA must be conducted prior to proclamation of winning candidates in order to prevent the possibility that wrong winners are brought to office and challenged through electoral protests which may take an entire term to decide.

With elections just 12 days away, NAMFREL deems that these safeguards are necessary in the face of numerous other safeguards which have been removed from the AES by the COMELEC.

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