

COLLATION OF FINDINGS AND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The delegates of the People's International Observers' Mission (People's IOM), representing 12 countries from throughout the world, were dispatched from May 14th to 16th, 2007 in order to observe, document and report on the mid-term national elections from the ground in seven key voting regions throughout the Philippines.

Participants in the People's IOM traveled from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, South Korea, Japan, Myanmar, Norway, Scotland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.S. in response to an international appeal from numerous church leaders, professionals, academics and grassroots organizations in the Philippines to observe the democratic process in the face of alleged electoral fraud, militarization and violence rampant during the 2004 national elections.

The diverse array of 27 observers who participated in the People's IOM, including trade unionists, students, social activists, clergy, academics, artists, and lawyers from around the world have contributed an essential piece to the popular effort to support the realization of democracy in the Philippines.

Contrary to an internationally publicized statement from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo that Filipino voters "cast their ballot, free of coercion and according to their own will," representatives of the People's IOM witnessed a strikingly different reality including: notable voter disenfranchisement, deadly election related violence, direct intimidation of voters by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), suspicious absence of COMELEC officials at numerous voting locations and incidents of overt coercion by multiple campaigners.

Detailed information on the election process collected by People's IOM representatives working throughout the country pointed to an intimate relationship between systemic violations of the electoral process in 2007, the ongoing socio-economic crisis in the Philippines rooted in neo-liberal economic policies and the terror of systemic extra-judicial killings which have claimed the lives of over 850 people since 2001.

The People's IOM representatives collected multiple testimonies gathered from community representatives outlining systematic harassment of voters supporting legitimate political party-lists by the AFP in voting districts throughout the country. Concrete documentation of an organized vilification campaign carried out both overtly and covertly by the AFP against legitimate party-lists was also documented by the People's IOM.

Throughout the Philippines overt political coercion through electoral corruption, open 'vote buying', rampant breaches of electoral regulations and

outright terror fashioned a context through which economic and ancestral political dynasties attempted to secure political positions through the mid-term elections.

Election-related violence ranging from killings to strafing, *grenade-throwing to manhandling has come to the IOM's attention. Targets of attacks include candidates, supporters, campaigners, organizers, and even innocent civilians. The spiral of violence among the rival candidates and political dynasties continued.

The People's IOM teams gathered comprehensive information on the Filipino electoral process, including extensive interviews with affected voters, hours of video testimony, hundreds of photographs from the following 10 areas; Tondo, Manila; Makati City; Quezon in Southern Tagalog; Sorsogon & Masbate in Bicol; Nueva Ecija & Pampanga in Central Luzon; Cebu in the Visayas; Islamic City of Marawi in Lanao del Sur & Compostela Valley in Mindanao.

Hereunder are the collation of findings and initial recommendations of the People's IOM:

Collation of Findings of the People's IOM



1. Strong military presence, intimidation and harassment of voters: the military played an extraordinarily active role in the elections, violating its proper role in a democratic society. Extra-judicial killings, campaigning for and against particular candidates, disenfranchising voters of opposition candidates, intimidation and harassment, deployment in opposition-influenced communities are many of the ways that the military used and overstepped its constitutional duty.
 - a. The residents expressed their deep fear over the military presence in their communities. Some of them sought the intervention of church leaders, while others formed alliances against the unprecedented deployment of their soldiers in their communities.
 - b. While the AFP announced that they will pull out of the urban poor communities before the elections, residents reported that some of the soldiers stayed in the communities dressed as civilians. These soldiers were later seen roaming the polling areas in civilian clothes, obviously not deputized by the COMELEC.
 - c. On election day and during the canvassing, police and military with heavy artillery were in polling places and canvassing centers instilling fear and intimidation among the voters, poll-watchers and the canvassers. Likewise, the presence of military men in the



COMELEC offices, in full battle gear, resulted in an atmosphere of fear.

- d. The military conducted house-to-house visits in the guise of doing census, interrogated citizens on what organizations existed in the communities and who were the leaders and organizers of specific party list and people's organizations in the community.
- e. The members of the mission were also informed by the community residents that the military showed films portraying certain party list and people's organization as fronts of the CPP and NPA and the people were told not to vote for these party list groups.
- f. Military checkpoints were encountered by the IOM team and one team was stopped twice, questioned, their names listed down and their photographs taken by the soldiers against their will.

2. Perpetuation of political dynasties: Political dynasties in the Philippines are well-entrenched and very powerful; political power is increasingly concentrated among members of a few families and clans that form the elite in Philippine society.

- a. The use of private armed groups by political clans to terrorize voters and contenders in local politics made the conduct of free and honest elections difficult, if not impossible.
- b. Rivalries between clans escalate into a vicious cycle of violence and reprisals.
- c. Barangay officials are mobilized to intimidate and coerce voters in the polling centers. These barangay officials also intimidate poll watchers to prevent them from exercising their duties specifically those opposed to the dominant political party in the area.
- d. Members of the same family are fielded to multiple elective positions simultaneously.

3. Labeling, use of fraud, harassment, and force against legitimate party-lists and opposition candidates:

- a. The killings of the leaders and members of these party list groups along with hundreds of other critics of the present administration are clear evidence of criminal attempts by state forces to drive these groups from the electoral arena and deprive the people of their democratic right to elect their own representatives.
- b. The military warned the people through barangay assemblies, film showings, and house-to-house visits, against voting for specific party-list groups such as Bayan Muna, Gabriela and

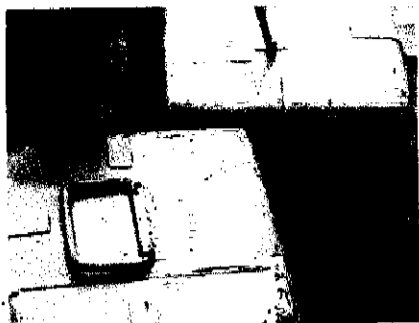


Anakpawis and told the residents that these are fronts of the CPP-NPA. They strongly endorsed other "party-list" organizations.

- c. Voters who are members of people's organizations and supporters of opposition candidates were disenfranchised, raising doubts that it is a deliberate action to ensure defeat for these specific candidates.
 - d. Many cases of these 'deactivated voters' also come from areas where AFP troops operated and conducted campaigns against legitimate party-list groups.
 - e. Attempts were made to unseat incumbent local officials critical of the government through suspension and filing of charges that are suspect in timing and basis.
4. General chaos, irregularities and vulnerabilities to manipulation of election results:



- a. Late delivery and lack of election paraphernalia causing delay and discouraging early voters from casting their votes.
- b. Names of voters were transferred or distributed to other voting precincts causing confusion. Many did not find the precinct where they were transferred.
- c. High number of "deactivated" voters which surprised many who were neither informed nor given clear explanations why they were "deactivated" by COMELEC.
- d. Discrepancies in COMELEC data: names of deceased still in the list; names not in voters' list; names transferred from one precinct to another.
- e. The assignments of election officers were changed at the last minute resulting in further chaos and raising doubts as to their independence.
- f. Many voters cast ballots several times. A voter was encouraged by the BEI to vote under another name just to speed up the process. Minors voted, instigated by supporters of candidates. Others admitted to being flying voters. In some areas, the so-called "indelible" ink can be easily washed off with soap and water or alcohol, while others had more than one finger marked with ink.
- g. There were varied forms of electioneering near and within the polling places: coaching (sometimes by the pollwatchers); sample ballots being distributed; candidates' propaganda materials displayed or used, etc.
- h. Rampant vote buying was observed in many areas. In one area, a mayoralty candidate responded to the question on the existence of vote buying by saying "*Well it's very natural here in the countryside, it's part of the elections here in the Philippines.*" (It is just like saying) "*Okay, here's something for you, so you can*



have snacks, pay the tricycle." It's really the culture. For me it's normal already. Because they (the people) won't vote (for me). Even in the last hour they are waiting for the highest bidder. It's only every three years that they get money. If you don't have money you won't win..."

- i. Traditional practices are corrupted to buy votes i.e. the Maranaos have a traditional practice called 'kanduri' or thanksgiving, in which gifts are shared with extended family on special occasions like birth and others. It has now been applied to the context of elections, and become a means of bribery as candidates freely give away money saying that it is their *kanduri*.
- j. Unsecured ballot boxes and careless ways of transferring ballot boxes from the precincts to the canvassing areas.
- k. Poor working conditions of the teachers and pollwatchers that make the performance of their tasks difficult.
- l. Physical set-up of canvassing areas is fertile ground for cheating and manipulation.
- m. Improper handling of election materials during canvass.
- n. Absence of COMELEC officials to sort out problems.

5. Other Observations

- a. Suspicious instances of power failure before and during canvassing.
- b. Massive and ostentatious spending by certain candidates.

Initial Recommendations of the People's IOM

The following recommendations by the IOM are directed toward popular movements and national authorities in the Philippines while also being aimed at the international community.

- 1) Review, identify and remove the areas, stages and conditions vulnerable for fraud and manipulation in the election process. Introduce certain electoral procedures which are less cumbersome and improve specific processes to make them more efficient and accessible while putting forward changes for the benefit of the grassroots.
- 2) Properly address and effectively check the military's interventionist policies, before, during and after elections that subvert democratic process and obstruct democratic will. Support the re-establishment of community organizations in militarized areas.
- 3) Assess, redefine and reinforce the partylist system and process to ensure that only legitimate organizations and nominees who sincerely represent the interests of marginalized sectors in society can qualify.



- 4) Resist, desist from and change the culture engendered by traditional politicians and their supporters of cheating, fraud and inappropriate election activities. Advocate for strict enforcement of the law and the filing of charges against and prosecution of violators of the law.
- 5) Mobilize national government machineries to ensure credible and clean elections which truly express popular democratic will by insulating the elections from the partisanship of its agencies, instrumentalities and public officers.
- 6) Increase and expand the education of voters on their rights, while raising awareness especially at the grassroots level in order to elevate consciousness towards the political system, the platforms or programs of political parties and not political personalities. People's initiatives must continue, be strengthened and supported by the international community.
- 7) Encourage the formation and maintenance of independent national electoral watchdogs, while continuing the unhampered entry of foreign observers to oversee all major election processes, to ensure electoral integrity, minimize violence while preventing fraud and electoral violations which subvert the people's democratic choices for political change.
- 8) Continue international fact-finding and solidarity missions even during non-election periods, to educate and build alliances with peoples from other countries, and mobilize others in our own countries to join in advocacy of the rights of the people.
- 9) Expose and publicize internationally the situation of violence, fraud and militarization in the Philippines through existing networks or possible new initiatives to further draw support for social-political change in the Philippines from a pro-poor and pro-genuine democracy perspective.
- 10) Conduct an independent and serious investigation on the conduct of the 2004 national elections to finally resolve issues surrounding the legitimacy of the Arroyo government. #

