



Press Release

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May 2007 Elections: Make or Break for COMELEC

The May 2007 election is a make or break for the Commission on Elections. Hounded by the unresolved controversies of massive cheating in 2004 presidential election which had implicated some of the poll body's top executives in allegedly rigging the election results in favor of the administration, the May 2007 political exercise will be a litmus test in their performance and credibility to conduct peaceful, orderly, and honest elections.

This was the general observation presented to the media by the People's Coalition to Monitor the 2007 Elections or **BANTAY ELEKSYON '07** in a press briefing last March 26, 2007, held at the Alex's Grill along Matalino St., Brgy. Central, Quezon City. The media briefing was called for to report to the public the preliminary assessment of the citizen's monitoring group's efforts to monitor the conduct of the May polls from pre-election campaign preparation last year up to the start of the local campaign next week. The preliminary assessment report contained ten areas of considerations, namely: decisions to hold May 2007 elections; election automation; appointments to the COMELEC; election preparations; application and approval of candidacies for senatorial positions; application, manifestation and approval of party-list groups; pre-election campaign activities; senatorial and party-list campaign; election violence; and organizing for election monitoring. The group raised issues of concern on each area.

Task Force Bantay-Eleksyon '07 is a coalition of electoral stakeholders formed by the **Consortium on Electoral Reforms (CER)**, composed of 22 national electoral reform organizations. It aims to comprehensively monitor the general conduct and processes of the May 2007 mid-term elections which will center on the evaluation of the Commission on Elections' performance and its deputized agencies.

“There is every reason to be vigilant regarding any possible ‘no-election, no-proclamation’ scenarios that may derail the holding of the May 2007 elections”, according to Mr. Andie Lasala, Head of Bantay Eleksyon Secretariat. He added that the speculations for a possible ‘no-el’ were seen in the proposals to change the charter, the late approval of the General Appropriation Act of 2007 and the fire that razed COMELEC old main office building last March 11.

“While the no-proclamation scenario rests on what is perceived to be the defect of the 1987 constitution, this defect may lead to a situation where there is only half of the Senate and the majority of the House of Representatives are not yet proclaimed,” as Lasala continued.

The effort to modernize election procedure has only gone in vain. Mr. Lasala expressed doubt that the passage of Republic Act 9369 or the new Election Automation Act of 2007 would make the May 2007 elections more effective because the COMELEC itself even admitted that it can only do a pilot testing project for this year's elections due to lack of necessary preparation and generally declared that the May 2007 polls would remain fully a manual voting system which has already proved to be a cumbersome, slow and open to various types of electoral fraud.

He (Lasala) voiced out the public clamor to appoint a new commissioner to help speed up the election procedures. He cited the agreement in the recent Philippine Election Forum, which was participated by different election stakeholders and in which the Executive Department even agreed to include it in its resolution.

The conduct of the election preparation of the COMELEC appeared to be in place. It was well within its election schedule. But Lasala feared that the recent development would once again put the COMELEC under public scrutiny over the issues of the burning incident its head office, over-printing of ballots and other accountable election forms and the copying of serial number- incidents inside NPO compound.

He also expressed concern in the handling and resolutions of COMELEC on the disqualification cases against some senatorial candidates. The poll body received 80 applications but it already disqualified 42 as nuisance candidates. At present 37 candidates were recommended by the Commission's Legal Department and approved by COMELEC en banc through Resolution No. 7832. This concern was quite similar with the case of party-list accreditation in which their criteria for approval were now being questioned by militant party-list groups.

The Pre-election scenario as his group observed showed the lack of respect and compliance of the unofficial candidates in the election processes as there were cases of unrestricted transfer of candidates from one party to another, the prevalent and ostensible electioneering activities and inadequacy and ineptness of the COMELEC to enforce election laws. The situation has turned to worse during the campaign period but no candidate is prosecuted and sanctioned yet. The use of government resources in relation to the elections despite being obvious was still unchecked and unregulated.

He also showed that there was indication of possible escalation of election-related violence. There were already 29 incidents reported to PNP. Most of these happened in the highly contested political areas. The proliferation of estimated 250,000 unlicensed firearms, the alleged involvement of police or military in partisan election activities and the possible intervention of military and rebel in the electoral process further heightened public apprehension.

Lastly, Mr. Lasala gave emphasis in a need for the public to monitor the elections and encourage the direct and active involvement of the citizens. He believed that the initial efforts to monitor the elections and the formation of volunteer groups nationwide are geared toward helping the poll body to achieve peaceful, honest and credible elections.

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