

**RESTORE THE PEOPLE'S TRUST IN THE 2010 ELECTIONS:
A Call for Open, Transparent, and Participatory Polls**

A Joint Public Statement

For Open, Transparent, and Participatory 2010 Elections

March 18, 2009

Quezon City, Philippines

The people's trust and confidence in the electoral system must be brought back in the May 2010 automated polls – the first automated national and local elections in the Philippines. The only way this can be done is to make the automated elections free, open, transparent, and with full people's participation.

We are concerned that this is not being addressed by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) through its use of the Optical Mark Reader (OMR) technology. As proven in the August 2008 ARMM elections – for that matter, in many electoral exercises in other countries - this technology is vulnerable to hacking, technical errors, delays, and other problems. And as the Comelec Advisory Council (CAC) itself admitted in a report in October 2008, the poll body is ill-equipped for the technological requirements of the coming elections.

Worse, this automated technology does not guarantee an open and transparent election. OMR uses internal tallying thus preventing voters from knowing whether their votes are counted let alone from tracking poll results through electronic transmission, canvassing, consolidation, and finally declaration of election winners. Because every step is supposed to be quick, all these will make citizens' poll watching more taxing if not a futile exercise.

While all these months the Comelec has prioritized the procurement of automated election equipment for the 2010 polls no attention has been paid on how to address the fraud mechanisms that are still in place all over the country. The use of automated technology will come to naught unless the poll body comes up with effective measures to make these powerful fraud mechanisms irrelevant. Such fraud mechanisms will come into play – possibly with greater force and vengeance – in the coming automated polls and no amount of modern technology will ensure the coming elections to be free, honest, and democratic. It will lead to wholesale electronic cheating. Election cheats from the national to local elections will continue to be unaccountable, as usual.

While there is still time the Comelec as well as Congress should welcome other proposals aimed at making the coming elections open, transparent, and participatory. One such proposal, the Open Election System (OES) combines manual precinct-level voting and counting with automated canvassing of votes at the city/municipality, provincial, and national levels. Aside from being a lot cheaper compared to the OMR, what makes this automated technology open, transparent, and participatory is the posting of election results on a public website that will be constantly accessible to all interested parties including the voters themselves as well as poll watchers and candidates. This system opens more guarantees for the verification of election data as well as ample time for the filing of election protests against anticipated widespread irregularities.

Moreover, the OES system complies with RA 9369 which calls for “transparency, credibility, fairness, and accuracy of elections” and prescribes “the adoption and use of the most suitable technology of demonstrated capability taking into account the situation prevailing in the area and the funds available for the purpose.”

This proposed system is adaptable to Philippine conditions and promotes the voters’ right to open and participatory election. It also requires less tedious and inexpensive training for both election officials and voters - so unlike in the OMR system. Based on the Comelec calendar, the only time the public and media will know the final customized and configured OMR election system is on February 22, 2010. This leaves only two months devoted to voters’ education and scrutiny by the public on the final configuration – contrary to the CAC’s recommendation of at least six months!

MOVEMENT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE (MGG)

Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG)

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