

JOINT STATEMENT

COMELEC SHOULD REVEAL PCOS-OMR SOURCE CODE

Good intentions are not enough; trust is built over time

May 12, 2009

This is a joint statement by the conveners of the March 18, 2009 forum on “Transparency in the 2010 Automated Elections” and the conveners of the forum “The 2010 Automated Elections: Where will it lead us to?” yesterday, May 11 held at the Computer Science Department at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City in response to the disturbing findings made in a study by the Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG) on the preparations being done by the Comelec for the Precinct Count Optical Scan-Optical Mark Reader (PCOS-OMR) technology to be used in the 2010 elections.

To ensure the democratic principle of “secret voting and public counting,” and in pursuit of the spirit of RA 9369, for “transparent, fair and credible elections,” we challenge the Commission on Elections to make public the source code for the (PCOS-OMR) that will be used in next year’s May 10, 2010 elections.

This challenge is being made as proponents of the alternative Open Election System told the audience that they will open the OES source code to the public after its presentation in a live demonstration before the press to be held next week. In the ARMM elections where automation was pilot tested, the Comelec failed to review the source code, a vital component of the elections technology which is required by law to be reviewed before it is used, as a safeguard against internal rigging.

The call to the Comelec is a resolution adopted by conveners and participants in yesterday’s forum on the 2010 automated polls and in their call for open, transparent, and credible elections.

This challenge is being issued, among others, by the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG), HEARTS Network, Dilaab Foundation, Laiko Foundation, and Hope Movement, along with the forum participants led by Bishop Deogracias Yniguez, former Comelec Chairman Christian Monsod, Dr. Pablo Manalastas and other religious and academics.

Conveners of an earlier March 18 forum also supported the challenge, including the Computing Society of the Philippines, Computer Professionals Union, TransparentElections.org, and the Movement for Good Governance.

In particular, Comelec should require the bidders for the P11.3-billion Precinct Count Optical Scan-Optical Mark Reader (PCOS-OMR) system to reveal their source code^[1] in order to allow Filipino IT specialists and other interested parties to scrutinize it. Comelec and its bidders must convince the country’s 50 million voters that their source code is not vulnerable to either hacking or rigging and that their votes will be counted accurately.

This announcement is being issued following yesterday’s forum. “The 2010 automated elections: Where will this lead to?” in which we invited the political analyst of CenPEG, Prof. Bobby Tuazon, to present their policy study, “Comelec’s PCOS-OMR rejects public counting, enhances wholesale cheating.”^[2]

Among others, the policy study reveals that the Comelec is unprepared and ill-equipped to address the complexities of next year’s automated elections. It also confirms fears from the IT community, poll watch groups, and other sectors of a possible wholesale electronic cheating because of the well-publicized deficiencies of the OMR and the still-embedded

cheating machineries nationwide. We should encourage Filipino expertise and technology that ensures open, transparent, and credible elections, instead of foreign technology that does not. This, the Comelec has failed to do at the start.

We also ask the Comelec to make available to the media and the public copies of the video documentation of the ongoing bidding process and negotiations with the bidders for the sake of transparency and scrutiny. Moreover, we ask all poll watch groups and other concerned organizations to begin the monitoring of the 2010 elections starting with the Comelec, the National Printing Office (NPO), and other vulnerable spots.

We reiterate these concerns even as we emphasize that good intentions are not enough. Trust, especially with the Comelec whose tarnished past is as unforgettable as the infamous “Hello Garci” in 2004, is built over time, not simply forgotten even with the most advanced technology.

Signed:

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With participants from JPICCC-AMRSP, Moment for Hope, Institute of Electronics Engineers, Libertas, Augustinian Missionaries of the Philippines, Cenacle, Ang Kapatiran Party, Caritas Manila and other religious, academics (long list)

[1] The source code is the human-readable version of the computer programs of the PCOS Comelec computers, Comelec canvassing computers, and Comelec server computers that will be used throughout the country for the May 10, 2010 automated elections. The source code is compiled to produce the executable machine programs that will run all the PCOS and Comelec canvassing and server computers.

[2] A copy of the study is available on the CenPEG website, www.cenpeg.org