



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

THE ASIAN ELECTORAL STAKEHOLDER FORUM RELEASES THE BANGKOK DECLARATION ON FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

BANGKOK, THAILAND 11 December 2012 – Asian electoral management bodies and civil society organizations are poised today to conclude their discussion of the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections at the end of their first-ever gathering to promote democratic, transparent elections on the world's most populous continent.

The Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum convened a two-day conference with participants from 11 Asian electoral management bodies and 30 Asian civil society organizations (representing 17 countries) devoted to advancing the cause of free and free elections. The Forum's 2-day meeting is a significant milestone in a process begun by the Asian Network for Free Elections in January of 2012 and aided by many other organizations along the way. Guests from the Libyan, Australian and Mexican electoral management bodies, as well as observers from foreign embassies in Bangkok and from governmental and non-governmental bodies based in Europe and the Americas, were also on-hand to witness the event.

"The delegates came to Bangkok to discuss electoral challenges that affect the ability to conduct free and fair elections throughout the continent and to adopt the Bangkok Declaration as a beacon lighting the way to improved elections throughout Asia," explained ANFREL Chairman Damaso Magbual. A year in the drafting stage, the Bangkok Declaration is the product of extensive discussion and input from both electoral management bodies and civil society groups.

As noted in the preamble to the Declaration, "The holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret ballots and universal suffrage is the true expression of the sovereignty of the people. Free and fair elections are a precondition of democracy and they promote social, political and economic development." The Declaration also emphasizes that the "principles for ensuring free and fair elections are universal."

The immediate objective of the Bangkok Declaration is to "identify the most significant and widespread barriers to free and fair elections in Asia and strengthen the

resolve of the Asian people to address them by involving all relevant national, regional and international stakeholders." It seeks to do this by (1) providing a sense of ownership to Asian peoples and election management bodies through the creation of a document that recognizes the sensitivities of Asian culture, religion and customary practices; (2) focusing on the broad universality of international principles on specific issues applicable to Asia; and (3) encouraging the participation of women and minorities as voters and leaders.

The Bangkok Declaration addresses the many diverse issues involved in the election process including EMB independence, the universal franchise, voter education, training of election officials, voter registration and accuracy of voter lists, campaign finance, unfair and dishonest campaign practices, election observation, safeguarding and counting votes and resolution of electoral disputes.

Following wide-ranging discussions among the delegates, the Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum concluded today at the United Nations Convention Centre in Bangkok to finalize the Bangkok Declaration and resolve to support its broad adoption throughout Asia. The Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum will follow up this, its inaugural meeting, by revisiting the Bangkok Declaration with a view to building even broader acceptance, consensus, and implementation across Asia.

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