

ASIAN ELECTORAL STAKEHOLDER FORUM CONVENES IN BANGKOK

(10 December 2012) Today witnessed the first-ever gathering of Asian civil society organizations and electoral management bodies to promote free and fair elections on the world's most populous continent. The Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum began its work this morning in Bangkok. Attending the two-day conference are 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. Guests from the Libyan, Australian and Mexican electoral management commissions, as well as observers from foreign embassies in Bangkok and from governmental and non-governmental bodies based in Europe and the Americas, are also attending.

The delegates are in Bangkok to discuss electoral challenges that affect the ability to conduct "clean" elections throughout the continent. During the two-day meeting, delegates will consider the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections. 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.

The 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 all major 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 discussions today, the Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum will meet at the United Nations Convention Centre in Bangkok tomorrow to finalize the Bangkok Declaration.

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