The 2nd Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum came to a successful close on March 19 after two days of substantive discussions and information sharing among representatives of Election Management Bodies and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Coming two years after the inaugural meeting of the AES Forum, this year’s co-hosts, the National Election Commission of Timor-Leste (CNE) and the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), expressed appreciation for the sustained dedication and enthusiasm of all participants. During the Forum’s two days, participants reaffirmed their shared commitment to improve the quality of elections in the region, most visibly through the release of the Dili Indicators of Democratic Elections.

The Dili Indicators are a practical distillation of the Bangkok Declaration for Free and Fair Elections, the set of principles endorsed at the 2012 meeting of the AES Forum. The Indicators provide a practical starting point to assess the quality and integrity of elections across the region.

More than 120 representatives from twenty-seven countries came together to share their expertise and focus attention on the most persistent challenges to elections in the region. Participants were primarily from Asia, but there were also participants from many of the countries of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). The AES Forum offered representatives from Electoral Management Bodies and Civil Society a chance to come together to discuss the most pressing challenges to elections in the region. Among the topics discussed were methods to advance the inclusion of women, minorities, and disabled persons in countries where they face challenges to full participation in political life, voting methods for overseas workers, campaign finance best practices and monitoring, electoral dispute resolution, and new technologies for voting, voter education, and providing more voting related information to enable better informed choices by voters.

Participants were also honored to hear from some of the most distinguished and influential leaders of Timor-Leste’s young democracy. The President of Timor-Leste, José Maria Vasconcelos A.K.A “Taur Matan Ruak”, opened the Forum, while Nobel Laureate Dr. Jose Ramos-Jorta, Founder of the State Dr. Mari Bim Hamude Alkatiri, and the country’s 1st president after independence and Founder of the State Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão also addressed the attendees. Each shared the wisdom gained from their years of trying to consolidate Timorese electoral democracy.

At the conclusion, the sponsors expressed the hope that this year’s AES Forum would serve as a springboard for enhanced knowledge and greater understanding and cooperation between EMBs and CSOs, thereby strengthening efforts to deliver the quality elections that their citizens so badly deserve.

2015 Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum Draws Much Needed Attention to Electoral Challenges in Asia

The Dili Indicators are a practical distillation of the Bangkok Declaration for Free and Fair Elections, the set of principles endorsed at the 2012 meeting of the AES Forum. The Indicators provide a practical starting point to assess the quality and integrity of elections across the region.

More than 120 representatives from twenty-seven countries came together to share their expertise and focus attention on the most persistent challenges to elections in the region. Participants were primarily from Asia, but there were also participants from many of the countries of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). The AES Forum offered representatives from Electoral Management Bodies and Civil Society a chance to come together to discuss the most pressing challenges to elections in the region. Among the topics discussed were methods to advance the inclusion of women, minorities, and disabled persons in countries where they face challenges to full participation in political life, voting methods for overseas workers, campaign finance best practices and monitoring, electoral dispute resolution, and new technologies for voting, voter education, and providing more voting related information to enable better informed choices by voters.

Participants were also honored to hear from some of the most distinguished and influential leaders of Timor-Leste’s young democracy. The President of Timor-Leste, José Maria Vasconcelos A.K.A “Taur Matan Ruak”, opened the Forum, while Nobel Laureate Dr. Jose Ramos-Jorta, Founder of the State Dr. Mari Bim Hamude Alkatiri, and the country’s 1st president after independence and Founder of the State Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão also addressed the attendees. Each shared the wisdom gained from their years of trying to consolidate Timorese electoral democracy.

At the conclusion, the sponsors expressed the hope that this year’s AES Forum would serve as a springboard for enhanced knowledge and greater understanding and cooperation between EMBs and CSOs, thereby strengthening efforts to deliver the quality elections that their citizens so badly deserve.
ANFREL signs MoU with the Carter Center and Participates in ELMO Training

On 13 March 2015, ANFREL, represented by its Executive Director, Mr. Ichal Supriadi, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with The Carter Center, represented by its Democracy Program Associate Director, Ms. Connie Moon Sehat. The signing was held in Dili, just prior to the AES Forum. ANFREL and the Carter Center agreed to collaborate on Election Monitoring (ELMO) Data Collection and Analysis Software System. Mr. Simao Lopes, Public Relations Officer of Timor Leste’s Election Commission (CNE), also a member of civil society organization Women Caucus, witnessed the signing. Members of the ANFREL secretariat and Carter Center intern Ms. Francesca Gilmore were also present during the signing.

Immediately after the signing, the Carter Center team facilitated training on ELMO for ANFREL staff. The training introduced the features of ELMO, how it functions, and how it can be used during an election observation mission and in other activities that require data collection. ELMO was developed by the Carter Center and has been used in a number of election monitoring missions since 2011. ELMO is an open-source data collection and reporting system, built specifically with election monitoring in mind. Equipped with ELMO, observers can submit evaluations of a process – via tablets (utilizing Open Data Kit), SMS, or directly online – in real-time to mission headquarters. ELMO’s reporting system organizes observer findings and is relied upon by Carter Center missions around the globe to analyze data and to assess elections as well as broader political processes.

The “Open ELMO” initiative aims to build a system optimized for elections and other human rights-related observation activities in a collaborative, open-source, and sustainable way.

ANFREL’s partnership with TCC is seen as a great opportunity to collaborate on strengthening electoral democracy in Asia through the use of Information Technology (IT) tools. For more information on Open ELMO Project, please visit http://getelmo.org.

The Third Regional Dialogue on Access to Elections is Held in Jakarta

ANFREL Executive Director Ichal Supriadi attended the Third Regional Dialogue on Access to Elections in Jakarta from January 28-29, 2015. The two-day conference was co-hosted by the General Election Network for Disability Access (AGENDA), the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB), and the General Election Commission of Indonesia (KPU). AGENDA is a Southeast Asian coalition comprised of disabled persons organizations (DPOs), election monitoring groups, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

The third Regional Dialogue on Access to Elections brought together more than 200 representatives from DPOs, election management bodies, governments, media, and international organizations to facilitate an exchange of ideas and best practices on strengthening equal access to political and electoral rights for persons with disabilities.

Participants from more than 25 countries across Southeast Asia and beyond joined expert panelists and presenters to explore emerging themes related to making the electoral process accessible, such as the need for increasing outreach to youth with disabilities, collaborating with media for greater representation in election coverage, and strategies for improving implementation of key international and regional policies, such as the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real.”

On the final day of the conference, participants agreed to the Jakarta Addendum 2015, which reaffirms the Bali Commitments established at the close of the 2nd Regional Dialogue in November 2012. In turn, the Bali Commitments supported the international frameworks on human rights – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – as the legal basis for the fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities. The participants held a community discussion on the Jakarta Addendum to address overlapping forms of marginalization, an effort to further support persons with disabilities who belong to more than one marginalized group, such as women with disabilities. The Jakarta Addendum is enclosed with this E-Bulletin.
A workshop was held on January 7, 2015 at Mahidol University for students and scholars from different countries across the globe. It was part of a renewed emphasis on building the capacities of citizen election observer groups and developing knowhow among students and youths about the importance of holding genuine and democratic elections as part of the democratization process.

The workshop was part of ANFREL’s commitment to promote capacity building among students in colleges and universities. ANFREL hopes that the knowledge thereby imparted would help students in their academic pursuits on democracy studies and, moreover, that it would prepare them to serve as student volunteers and election monitors. This initiative was conceptualized as part of ANFREL’s Asian Electoral Resource Centre (AERC) project as part of its capacity building unit.

The workshop was designed in recognition of the importance of arming students and youths with tools and knowledge on the electoral process, election monitoring and reporting on the management and conduct of elections. Students at different times in their careers can function as election monitors and media reporters to help ensure that elections are free, fair and transparent and that official results accurately reflect the choices of the voters.

ANFREL resource persons highlighted the principles and values enshrined in the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections and reiterated the importance of upholding the principles of universal suffrage and the need for regular and periodic elections and equal opportunities for all contesting political parties and candidates, as well as the necessity of fair access to the media and an independent electoral process.

ANFREL Myanmar Country Representative Bidhayak Das, who is also a facilitator on election training, conducted the workshop.

ANFREL Launches Election Monitoring Handbook in Myanmar

ANFREL Myanmar released an Election Monitoring Manual to assist both the media and civil society in Myanmar in monitoring and reporting about management and conduct of elections while maintaining the principles of transparency and accountability. The manual was prepared as part of ANFREL’s efforts to promote democracy in Asia wherever it undertakes an election observation mission or engages with electoral stakeholders on capacity building. ANFREL hopes that the manual will enhance the strengthening of democratic norms in Asia.

The manual provides the basic information required for election observers to function competently. Included in the manual are discussions of election monitoring methodologies employed by citizen observer groups in almost any election.
EOM: Sri Lanka Presidential Election 2015: “A Triumph of the People”

Following the January 8, 2015 presidential election, ANFREL congratulated the people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for their commitment to strengthen democracy by participating in the 2015 Presidential Election. ANFREL also commended the Department of Elections for showing professionalism and commitment in administering the election while maintaining transparency, accountability, and fairness despite the challenges and limitations it faced. ANFREL further extended its appreciation to the national monitoring organizations for their work to uphold the sanctity of the vote. The joint efforts of all stakeholders fostered an environment conducive to the strong voter turnout witnessed on 8 January.

After analyzing the reports of our 35 international election observers deployed across the country, ANFREL said it was confident that the election was held in a largely peaceful manner. ANFREL observers witnessed a smooth and transparent polling and counting process with only isolated irregularities and violence. However, ANFREL said it remained concerned with respect to the principles of fairness and free and fair elections, in particular, in regard to the misuse and abuse of state resources and the absence of a level playing field among contending parties.

ANFREL observed several incidents of misuse of public property such as the use of public buses to transport people to campaign rallies. Similar concerns were highlighted by national monitoring groups that contended that public funds and the government bureaucracy had been misused to serve the governing party’s campaign. Furthermore, ANFREL noted unequal access to media, with the then-ruling party receiving disproportionate air time on both public and private channels.

ANFREL also reported on an environment of fear in different provinces including Eastern, North Western, and Northern provinces where voters expressed some hesitation in expressing their opinions about the electoral process. Vandalism of party offices and private property as well as assaults on party workers and supporters were also serious concerns, as was an atmosphere of intimidation against civil society members. ANFREL called for all such incidents to be investigated and perpetrators to be prosecuted equally according to existing Sri Lankan law.

“ANFREL urges Sri Lanka to enact and enforce adequate electoral laws including measures to level the playing field, empower the Department of Elections, institute campaign finance regulations, ensure freedom of the media, and strengthen regulations over the misuse of state resources. These key elements are absent from the current election law”, said ANFREL’s Mission Head Damaso Magbual.

During the mission, ANFREL worked in 24 districts in Sri Lanka, assessing 250 subdivision villages and visited, and/or interviewed more than 500 electoral stakeholders including election officials, five presidential candidates (including representatives of the then-incumbent, the Secretary General of the SLFP, 6 ministers and senior ministers), and the opposition’s common candidate, elections monitoring groups, government officials, civil society organizations, religious leaders, academics, community leaders, youth organizations, and women’s groups. On Election Day itself, the mission observed at 213 polling centers, with a total of 316 polling stations (booths), and the mission then monitored the counting process at 24 counting centers on January 8 and 9.
The Dili Conference, a Pioneering Asian Effort

The Asian Electoral Stakeholders Forum (AESF) was initiated in the belief that a successful election is the result of collaborative and cooperative efforts of various political actors with different roles to play. Hence, the words of Dr. Shamsul Huda, Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh (2008 election) that “The election commission alone cannot ensure the success of an election”. Each stakeholder then shares in the responsibility as well as in the accountability to bring about a successful election.

During the forum in Dili, Timor Leste, one of the resource speakers noted the prevalence of mistrust between election management bodies (EMBs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). The EMBs think the CSOs are out to find faults while the CSOs suspect the EMBs are on manipulating the election results. Through the Forum, ANFREL aims to be a catalyst to bring together the different players of the electoral process to appreciate their respective roles while they admit their interdependence to bring about a successful election. The Forum highlights the commonality of values and goals between the EMBs and the CSOs so that elections are legitimate, binding, and acceptable to all.

The Dili Conference is a classic example of what can be accomplished when an EMB and a CSO work together. The National Electoral Commission (Comissão Nacional de Eleições) of Timor Leste and ANFREL planned, funded, organized and implemented the activity solely on their own without the help of foreign resources or expertise. The two past presidents of the republic who spoke to the group took pride in the CNE’s effort to take the lead in an undertaking worth emulating by the others. We share this pride!

I thank the government of Timor Leste particularly CNE for their hosting of the conference. We appreciate the presence and active participation of the EMBs from the different countries, some coming from as far as Africa. We are grateful for the support of the ANFREL members as well the other CSO heads and members. I highly commend the ANFREL Staff from Bangkok, led by the Executive Director, for the hard work they did to make the conference a resounding success.

Dili, Timor Leste will be remembered as the birthplace of the first Asian effort to come out with a set of indicators to assess and evaluate elections in Asia pursuant to the principles enshrined in the Bangkok Declaration.

ANFREL is greatly inspired by the interest of some participants to co-host the next conference.

See you all in the AESF 3!
Sri Lanka: March 12 Declaration

In Sri Lanka, ANFREL’s member organization People’s Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) took the lead in fashioning a historical achievement in the country’s political history.

PAFFREL initiated efforts to forge an agreement among parties across the political spectrum on criteria for selecting candidates for elections. The drafting of a declaration is part of the endeavor to transform the political culture in Sri Lanka. Representatives of political parties, both from the government and from the opposition, including the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition, gathered at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Sri Lanka’s capital in Colombo to endorse the March 12 Declaration - the selection criteria for nominating candidates.

This document was developed through a series of discussions with different stakeholders, including religious leaders, members of the media, academics, trade unions, Election Department officials, Sri Lanka Administration Service Association, the business community, members of Parliament, local government authorities, and civil society.

Political parties endorsed the criteria developed under PAFFREL’s leadership and agreed to take them into account when selecting candidates for all future elections.

The criteria for candidate selection are as follows. A candidate:

1. Should not be a person who has served a jail sentence for a crime or a person who has received a suspended sentence.
2. Should not be a person proven guilty of bribery or corruption but should be one who is acceptable to society and is person of good character. In addition, extra care should be given if a potential candidate has been accused of bribery or corruption but has not been convicted.
3. Should not be a person who is engaging or has engaged in the past in trades such as alcohol, drugs, gambling, casinos, and prostitution that are detrimental to the wellbeing of the country.
4. Should not be a person who is engaging or has engaged in a trade which destroys the ecological life support system or that causes destruction to the environment.
5. Should not be a person who has abused or misused political power.
6. Should not be a person who has entered into financial agreements prejudicial to the country before becoming a people’s representative or while a people’s representative.
7. Should be either a resident or have an amiable relationship with the residents of the area they represent.
8. Should be considered in the context of providing adequate opportunities for representation of women and youth as candidates.

At least 13 individuals representing 11 major political parties in Sri Lanka (UNP, SLFP, UPFA, JVP, JHU, TNA, EPDP, SLMC, USP, NSSP, and SCP) signed the agreement. The set of criteria is to be included in the proposed code of conduct due to be introduced to politicians as part of the 100-day program of the new government.
Annual Democracy and Political Irregularities Reports

By the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia

In Cambodia, Democratization in 2014 is continued to be undermined by serious shortcomings preventing Cambodia from moving forward towards an established democracy. Any positive political developments were gradual and highly uncertain. It remains to be seen if these changes can put the democratization process back on the right track.

The dispute over the 2013 national election results and the following political crisis once again paralyzed the democratization process in 2014. The freedom of peaceful assembly was put on hold. Only one year after the 2013 national election was an agreement reached between opposition and government to end the political crisis. This paved the way for a reform process allowing cautious optimism for some democratic progress. However, the negotiation process often came close to stalling over details related to electoral and legislative reforms and the lack of public participation.

By the end of 2014 it was uncertain just how far reaching election and legislative reforms would be. Negotiations over electoral and legislative reforms were moved forward to 2015.

Democratic governance appeared to improve after the July agreement. Legislative reforms strengthened the principle of separation of powers. The legislative gained in power demonstrating the prospect for improved performance. Nonetheless, in the first half of 2014 the opposition, represented by the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), was not involved in the process thus limiting the performance of the legislative and executive. The absence of the opposition called into question the legitimacy of the law-making process and the newly formed CPP-led Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). The executive continued to lack transparency and accountability. In particular, no genuine judicial reforms have been undertaken to safeguard its independence. The judiciary remains a partisan body and the weak link in the governance system.

The bi-partisan creation of the CPP-CNRP Joint Commission for Electoral Reform seemed like a positive step in the direction of electoral reform, but the process had not been transparent and inclusive. Reform of the composition of the National Election Committee (NEC) was approved by CNRP and CPP lawmakers, and included constitutional amendments. Major reform proposals negotiated in 2014 included a draft ‘Law on the Organization and Functioning of the NEC’, revisions of the current ‘Law on the Elections of Members of the National Assembly’ (LEMNA), including reform of the voter registration system. A draft law on the new NEC has been finalized. Negotiations for revisions of the LEMNA continued in 2015.

Notwithstanding these promising new laws, it was highly uncertain if negotiations of the envisaged election reforms would lead to an overall improvement of the election process. The new LEMNA included, changes to voter registration and restriction of the election campaign. Of great concern, it was the inclusion of restrictions on electoral freedoms for contesting parties and CSOs, while legitimizing partisan engagement in the electoral cycle of court officials, the military and national police.

The conclusion of human rights abuses, in particular political and civil rights violations by the RGC were a cause for serious concern. Democratic space and freedoms did not improve in 2014. The RGC security apparatus continued to use excessive force against protesters during demonstrations. Numerous attacks, harassment and intimidation directed against trade unionists, journalists and civil and political rights activists, including CNRP lawmakers and party members were reported. No measures were taken by government to constrain security forces from using excessive force against protesters.

The establishment of a new National Election Committee will be decided by the bi-partisan National Assembly. It will adopt 24 provisions of the draft law on Organization and Functioning of the NEC. Fifteen provisions are viewed as positive or could be considered as a better than the old LEMNA, while nine provisions are seen as negative, uncertain or worse than the previous LEMNA.

The report on Cambodia’s state of democracy in 2014 is based on findings of COMFREL’s Advocacy and Monitoring Units ‘Government Watch’, ‘Parliamentary Watch’, ‘Media Watch’, ‘Election Watch’, ‘Gender Watch’, the ‘Access to Information NGO Working Group’ and the Election Reform Alliance (ERA). COMFREL also adopts a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. COMFREL developed a qualitative roster of democracy indicators to answer relevant questions in 2014. The report analyses the powers, performances and reforms of the legislative, judiciary and executive. Particular attention is given to the political process that ended the post-election political crisis.

Full copy of the report can be downloaded at: http://www.comfrel.org/eng/
Exploring Open Data Approach to Innovative Voter Engagement

Contributed by: Perkumpulan Untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (PERLUDEM, Indonesia)

The election process in Indonesia went through significant changes and improvements in 2014. Experts pointed out that the 2014 legislative and presidential elections were the most competitive yet the most exciting elections to happen in Indonesia’s history. The 2014 elections also introduced innovations to make the electoral process closer to the people.

One of the successful innovations was the introduction of API Pemilu (Application Programming Interface), the use of technology in voter information. PERLUDEM (Association for Election and Democracy), one of ANFREL’s members in Indonesia, created the first-ever Indonesia election database using API. API is a responsive, scalable online database of electoral data, making it possible to develop applications that can deliver important election information to millions of Indonesians via mobile or web services. The database contains an extensive collection of election-related information like candidate backgrounds, political party details, aggregated news and social media feeds, election maps, and a schedule of political events.

Indonesia, the fourth most populated country after China, India, and the United States of America, is now able to closely monitor its electoral process despite the challenges it faces. The creative innovations paved the way for people to not only monitor the elections but also develop voter engagement and active civic education. These efforts stemmed from the great number of social media users and high interest to use Information Communication Technology (ICT) to support the government in holding free and fair elections.

API allows anyone to build and distribute a custom application that can request information from a database. This allows developers and IT Programmers to have access to data or to request specific data.

One of the major successes of the program was the holding of Hackathon API Pemilu, an event where software developers and programmers competed to create software projects in a limited time. Almost 500 developers participated. They were asked to develop election applications within 24 hours. The event resulted in a high level of interest among developers. At least 485 application keys were registered for API, translating to the same number of developers or developer groups showing interest in developing election related applications. The event successfully published 44 Apps after the Hackathon, and these apps are featured at http://pemilu-apps.org. As for raw traffic hitting the API, the application has processed more than 101 million hits from 16 million unique users.

A second successful Hackathon was organized by PERLUDEM and The Asia Foundation. The event was sponsored by Google and it showcased that API Pemilu can lead to a new level of public-private partnership. As a result of API Pemilu, Indonesia’s General Elections Commission (KPU) also launched its own API for the legislative elections.

These innovations will continue to expand. A series of local elections will take place in 2015. It is anticipated that a humungous amount of election data and information will be transmitted and updated on a daily basis. Looking at this evolving trend, PERLUDEM, through its API Pemilu Program, will continue to introduce initiatives to support the election commission in achieving successful elections with high levels of public participation and voter engagement to help the Indonesian voters make informed choices when selecting their leaders.
The Center for National Assembly Watch of People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) has supported political reform movements by monitoring and evaluating activities of the members of the National Assembly, urging reforms to the political system and organizing voter campaigns during elections. The center has filed a constitutional complaint with the Constitutional Court asserting that the current electoral system infringes electoral rights by failing to lower the voting age and restricting voter campaigns. Moreover, the center has provided comprehensive political reform bills, filed petitions with the National Assembly, and launched nationwide campaigns to push through these reforms.

On 3 March 2015, the National Assembly of South Korea passed a resolution to form a Special Committee on Political Reform to discuss ways to improve the political system including plans for demarcating constituency. The civil society, which has insisted during the past few years on increasing the number of seats of proportional representation and on guaranteeing voters’ freedom of expression, held a press conference to deliver its demands to the Special Committee on Political Reform. Its major demands are as follows:

- **Increase the number of seats allocated by proportional representation to reflect voices of various groups and preferences of voters.**

  The current electoral system in South Korea distorts the allocation of parliamentary seats and does not fully reflect voter preferences, especially those of minorities and various vocational groups. Therefore, it is urgent to push through constituency demarcation reforms and to raise the number of seats allocated by proportional representation. Nevertheless, certain voices among politicians even claim the number of proportional seats should be lowered to maintain the number of seats for their local districts. The Special Committee on Political Reform should discuss electoral reform in ways that resolve not only regionalism but also underrepresentation of various vocational groups, sexual minorities, immigrants and women.

- **Reform the current Constituency Demarcation Committee, which only is an advisory body to a permanent and independent committee**

  In order to ensure fair constituency demarcating, it is required to change the system in which the Constituency Demarcation Committee, which is composed of external experts, submits a bill on constituency demarcation to the National Assembly, which only needs to “respect” the constituency demarcation bill. Thus, currently, the constituency demarcation bill submitted to the National Assembly is not legally binding, and as a result, the National Assembly has been distorting the constituency demarcation proposed by the Committee in favor of their interests. Given that both the ruling and the opposition parties have recently promised to increase the authority of the Constituency Demarcation Committee and to allow its independent operation, the bill on reforming the Constituency Demarcation Committee should be passed without delay.

- **Guarantee the fundamental political rights of voters**

  The current Public Official Election Act restricts voters’ right to freedom of opinion and expression by stipulating a vague standard of “defamation” and applies comprehensive regulations to offline election campaigns. The National Assembly should revise the Public Official Election Act so as to guarantee voters’ rights to freedom of opinion and expression. In addition, voters who
voluntarily organize political associations are currently restricted by rules containing excessive requirements to establish a political party and allowing only nationwide parties. Grassroots parties should be allowed in order to prevent the monopoly of a particular political party in certain areas. It is required that the Special Committee on Political Reform collects opinions of civil society and holds responsible discussions on this matter.

Lastly, it must be noted that the discussions on political reform should not hinge on the interests of members of the National Assembly from local constituencies and the major political parties. Selection of members of the National Assembly representing the will of the people, not only for politicians but also for all voters. South Korean civil society organizations demanded the National Assembly, the institution representing the will of the people, initiate political reforms through pan-national discussions and preparation of plans to accomplish reform.

BERSIH 2.0: Malaysia’s Fight for Electoral Reforms

Contributed by: Ms. Zoe Randhawa, Advocacy and Education Officer, BERSIH 2.0 Secretariat

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) was established in 2007 and was revised into a civil society-led initiative in 2010 (BERSIH 2.0). The aim was and still is to reform Malaysia’s corrupted and failing electoral system into one that could be seen to be free and fair.

BERSIH 2.0 has galvanized the public, creating a mass movement demanding electoral change, resulting in a Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform. However, concrete changes have not materialized. Recently, an Electoral Integrity Project report, which included 127 countries, ranked Malaysia worst in the world for electoral district boundaries and 125th out of 127 for electoral laws. As such, BERSIH 2.0 has been focusing on the upcoming re-delineation of constituency boundaries, as well as cleaning up the electoral roll.

Electoral Boundaries

In the 2013 General Election, the Barisan Nasional coalition government won 46.5% of the popular vote while the opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat, won 50.9%. However, Barisan Nasional still held on to power with 60% of the seats in Parliament. The average number of voters in constituencies won by Pakatan Rakyat was 77,655, but for Barisan Nasional it was just 46,510.

Electoral boundaries also appear to criss-cross through towns and villages, ignoring local community ties. In fact, there are a number of cases where houses are split into two different constituencies; husbands and wives with the same address vote for different Members of Parliament.

The former Election Commission chairperson admitted after he left the position that the previous re-delineation exercises “ensured Malays remained in power.” BERSIH 2.0 is determined to ensure the upcoming re-delineation exercise follows the Constitution and ensures fair constituency boundaries for all voters.

The Electoral Roll

In 2001, there was a High Court ruling that the electoral roll used for a constituency was ‘illegal’. In fact, the court found: “The instances of non-citizens and phantom voters in the electoral roll as disclosed in this trial may be the tip of the iceberg. It could not be denied that the registration of voters in the Likas electoral roll was in contravention of the law.”

After this ruling, the Malaysian Parliament amended the Elections Act to prevent the electoral roll being challenged in any court. Even as recently as last year, a Royal Commission of Inquiry found that there are non-citizens on the electoral roll in Malaysia.

Despite the Malaysian Electoral Roll Analysis Project continuously finding and publicizing discrepancies in the roll, forcing a thorough clean-up of the roll by the Electoral Commission remains an ongoing challenge.
Monitoring Polls, Way of Improving Democracy

Contributed by:
Dr. Chen Chien-Fu
Standing Director, Citizens Congress Watch (CCW)
Chairperson, Taiwan Network for Free Elections (TANFREL)
Translation by: Mr. Paul Cooper

Monitoring Polls, Way of Improving Democracy

Some might contend that including provisions for international observers in electoral and recall legislation is inviting interference from foreign powers.

This is absolutely not the case, as any international observation group compiles an “electoral observer handbook” reflecting the historical, cultural, political and economic factors of the nation in question — as well as other factors, such as that nation’s civic society and political parties.

Even though legislation covering elections and recalls does not specifically state whether international observer groups are allowed to monitor elections in Taiwan, a large budget has been allocated for two or three Taiwanese monitors to be present at every polling station.

While — on the face of it — this is to prevent electoral fraud, it is really done just so that political parties can confirm ballot results.

This opens the Central Election Commission to suspicions from non-governmental organizations that it is overstepping the boundaries of neutrality that it should observe in its implementation of electoral and recall legislation.

From national assembly elections and constituent assembly elections to plebiscites on independence and state elections around the world, polls are monitored by international observers from the Carter Center in the US, the European Parliament and the Asia Network for Free Elections.

International observers must follow the 2005 UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers when carrying out their work including: “the systematic, comprehensive and accurate gathering of information concerning the laws, processes and institutions related to the conduct of elections and other factors concerning the overall electoral environment; the impartial and professional analysis of such information; and the drawing of conclusions about the character of electoral processes,” as well as the provision of a report on any problems or shortcomings observed during the course of the election.

The commission has long been a member of international election organizations, such as the Association of Asian Election Authorities, but in terms of reforming Taiwan’s electoral system, election laws, administrative procedures and other supporting measures, it falls short of other Asian nations, such as South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Mongolia.

In response to demands from civic groups to amend electoral legislation to allow international observers in, as happens in these other association member nations, the commission has said that it has never prohibited international observers from coming to monitor elections, and has tried to use the excuse that — due to the international situation — Taiwan is unable to sign either the declaration of principles or the code of conduct.

It has even, on occasion, resorted to saying that it “does not have the funds,” to do so, and that all it can do is to invite these association observer groups in their official capacity to come to monitor the elections.

In the electoral and recall legislation, the problem with including provisions for international observers lies not in the supposed lack of funds, but in the fundamental disregard of the core functions of elections by those in charge, namely, that ballots are free, comprehensive, open, fair and sometimes — when needed — operate as a mechanism for a peaceful transition of political power.
Republic of Kazakhstan
Presidential Elections
April 26, 2015

Early presidential elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan will be held on 26 April 2015, one year ahead from its original schedule. This move was unanimously voted by the country’s People’s Assembly in February 2015. The decision was based on the belief that holding the elections earlier would help the development of the country and that it is a disadvantage to hold both presidential and parliamentary elections in the same year.

Republic of Turkey
Election for Grand National Assembly
June 7, 2015

The general elections in Turkey will be held on the 7th of June to elect the 550 members of its Grand National Assembly. It will be the 24th general elections in the Republic of Turkey. Elected members will form the 25th Parliament of Turkey.

Source: ElectionGuide
(www.electionguide.org)

THE ANFREL E-BULLETIN

ANFREL E-bulletin is ANFREL’s quarterly publication issued as part of the Asian Electoral Resource Center (AERC) program. Each E-bulletin includes relevant and important updates regarding Asian electoral developments.

We encourage ANFREL members and friends to contribute articles to the e-bulletin. For questions, suggestions, or inquiries, you may send us an e-mail at e-bulletin@anfrel.org.

ABOUT ANFREL

The Asia Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) was established in 1997 as Asia’s first regional network of civil society organizations focused on elections and election monitoring. It strives to promote and support democratization at national and regional levels in Asia.

ANFREL is supported by a number of national organizations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Thailand.

For more information you may visit http://www.anfrel.org

Asian Network for Free Elections
105 Sutthisarnwinnichai Rd, Huaykwang, Samsennok, Bangkok 10310 Thailand

PHONE : (+66) 2-277-3627
FAX : (+66) 2-276-2183
E-MAIL : anfrel@anfrel.org