THAILAND ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY AT A GLANCE

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THAILAND ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY AT A GLANCE

“The junta’s failure to place voters and elections as a foundational part of their reform plan makes their proposed reforms unlikely to be sustained in the future. If and when backlash to current reforms strikes, rather than another coup, the country will be better off if citizens and the military rise up to protect Elections and voting itself. Voters across the world, when given the chance, have shown a remarkable desire to vote for their own legitimate change of power after tiring of incumbent governments. In Thailand, military coups have instead repeatedly pre-empted and short-circuited this foundational mechanism of electoral democracy.

View full statement at:

As ANFREL encourages the government to lessen the harmful impact of the coup and move the country in a sustainable democratic direction, it may be worthwhile to take a quick look at how electoral democracy is progressing in Thailand in 2015.
ECT considers German Electoral System through lecture session

Activists rally on Valentines Day to campaign for their “Beloved Stolen Election”

Three people were detained for attitude adjustment after the anti-coup protest.

National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) tries to create Election Committee; ECT asserts its rights to retain powers

Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) says Elections to take place 180 days after new charter is in effect

Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) introduces eight-point proposal *

Constitution Drafting Committee submits draft constitution to the National Reform Council

Thai academics and activists call for referendum on new constitution

ECT showcases the new voting process, introducing a sample paper ballot

May 22: Thailand commemorates coup anniversary; activists call for restoration of democracy through elections

Media and CSO launch website to conduct polls on new constitution

Discussions between the NCPO and the Cabinet continue to discuss possible holding of referendum either in December or January

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha announced he would not rush transition to democracy until the following pre-conditions are met:

- Next elections are peaceful
- The election of new government will do away with conflicts and protests again
- Thailand will be able to continue with its various reform efforts.

* NEWS SOURCES:
http://www.ect.go.th
http://www.ect.go.th/th/?p=4769
ANFREL participated in the Third Implementation Meeting of the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations as well as a three way Election Dialogue between Election Management Bodies, Citizen Observers, and International Observers in Johannesburg, South Africa from the 8th to the 11th of June 2015. ANFREL Chairperson Mr. Damaso Magbual, acting in his role as the Chair of GNDEM, helped open both meetings.

The two-day Implementation Meeting for members of the Global Network for Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM) was generously co-hosted by the Southern African Development Community Election Support Network (ESN-SA).

The meeting was broadly organized around three thematic areas 1) Solidarity and Credibility, 2) External Communication and Outreach, and 3) Advocacy for Electoral Transparency. In addition to ANFREL, participants came from Acuerdo de Lima in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab Network for Democratic Elections (ANDE), the East and Horn of Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN), the Election Network in the Arab Region (ENAR), the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), the Southern African Development Community - Election Support Network (SADC-ESN) and the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON). The conference allowed participants to share their wealth of experience and to discuss the key challenges to electoral integrity in the countries where each group observes. Finding a great deal of common ground, the groups vowed to refocus efforts in working together to support common causes as observers. At the meeting’s conclusion, working groups were formed around the three thematic areas with firm commitments for the next year to build the capacity of citizen observers and citizen observer networks to address the key challenges. During the meeting, Mr. Magbual was re-elected as chair of the group.

Following the GNDEM meeting, ANFREL was part of a two-day Election Dialogue between Electoral Management Bodies, Citizens Observers, and International Observers that focused on Enhancing Electoral Integrity and Electoral Transparency.

The Sharing many of the same goals as the Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum, the Election Dialogue built bridges between the observer and EMB communities and identified areas where the groups could work together to further electoral integrity and public confidence in electoral systems.
ANFREL Expresses Its Solidarity with the People of Nepal in their Time of Need

On May 12, 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit the naturally blessed country of Nepal. Many lives were lost and buildings destroyed. Several families remain in temporary shelters and are currently living in fear, as the country is still prone to aftershocks.

The extent of the disaster is something beyond the ability of most people to imagine, but the strength and resilience that the survivors have shown to date is truly admirable and augurs well for Nepal’s recovery.

ANFREL expresses its deepest sorrow for the lives lost and the injuries suffered by so many Nepalis. We call on our friends to have a moment of silence to honor those who perished and pray for the survivors to be able to quickly rebuild their lives and rise from the rubble of the disaster.

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Rohana Hettiarchchie, Secretary General, Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)

It is my pleasure to convey a message as Secretary General of ANFREL in the Asian Electoral Resource Center (AERC)’s third E-Bulletin issue.

It coincides with a period of long drawn-out political turmoil in the region. Many countries within Asia are making all-out efforts to reinforce the powers of the institutions for good governance.

It is significant therefore to take stock of the political culture of each country and network with election monitoring bodies of the region to help each other achieve free and fair elections in their respective countries.

While acknowledging the efforts to make the Bulletin more comprehensive, my fervent hope is that it would contribute to the sharing of relevant information among a wide cross section of readers, academics, politicians, and policy level institutions.

I wish all success to ANFREL and all our networking partners and would appreciate it if all of you could contribute suggestions and articles to the Asian Electoral Resource Centre (AERC)’s quarterly e-bulletin.

Photo Source: Time.com
FROM AROUND THE ANFREL NETWORK

Afghanistan Electoral Stakeholders sign the Declaration of Substantive Principles of Electoral Reform

Contributed by: the Free and Fair Elections Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA)

The Free and Fair Elections Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA) gathered leaders and heads of political parties, Civil Society Organizations, and media organizations (members of Electoral Reform Joint Working Group) to officially sign the Declaration of Principles of Electoral Reform.

Leaders and heads of political parties, CSOs, and media organizations signed the declaration in the presence of authorized representatives from the offices of the President and Chief Executive.

During the ceremony, FEFA Chairperson, Ahmad Nader Naderi, emphasized on the role of political parties in electoral processes. He added that political progress would depend on the contributions of political parties and CSOs. He lamented that these roles were not fulfilled in the past 13 years.

Although he said that previous elections had bitter and sweet lessons, these lessons should be used to prevent occurrence of problems and challenges in future elections. Thus political leaders agreed on pushing for reforms in Afghanistan’s electoral system to prevent the same mistakes from happening again. The consensus among political groups is therefore crucial in moving forward.

By signing the declaration, the people of Afghanistan are showing the government leaders that they want immediate reforms in its electoral system, Mr. Naderi said.

FEFA’s Executive Director, Mr. Yousuf Rasheed, made a presentation on the organization’s programs in strengthening the role of political parties and CSOs. He underscored on the joint principles identified by the Electoral Reform Joint Working Group. They are the following: Establishment of the Electoral Reform commission, preparation of voters list, issuance of electronic identification cards, amendment of electoral laws, revision of the electoral system to increase the role and participation of political parties, and improved transparency and accountability measures for the electoral commissions.

Mr. Yousuf Rasheed, FEFA Executive Director presents the principles in the declaration during the gathering of Afghanistan Election Stakeholders.

Mr. Ahmad Zia Masoud, the special representative of the president for reforms and good governance affairs welcomed the declaration on behalf of the government. He believes that the declaration is positive step toward paving the ground for fundamental reforms in Afghanistan. He acknowledged FEFA’s efforts and contributions in the institutionalization of democracy in the country.

A representative from the Chief Executive office also expressed his deepest appreciation of the efforts of FEFA, political parties, CSOs, and the media to prepare and agree on a document that mentions substantive reforms. No elections will happen without electoral reforms, he said.

The stakeholders who were present in the gathering expressed commitment to support electoral reforms especially on the areas pointed in the declaration. The declaration highlighted the roles of government in electoral reform such as the need to commence the work of the electoral commission and to hold the Loya Jirga in accordance to the constitution. It also stress out on the role of other stakeholders such as the civil society, political parties, the media, and the international community.

In closing, the legal adviser of the president, Mr. Abdul Ali Mohammadi said that the election reform commission will start its work a week after the gathering of electoral stakeholders.

View full document of the Declaration:
Bangladesh Holds Elections in Dhaka North, Dhaka South, and Chittagong City Corporation

Contributed by: Odhikar

On April 28, 2015, Bangladesh held mayoral elections in Dhaka North, Dhaka South, and Chittagong City Corporation. It was reported that the main opposition party, Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and other left wing parties withdrew from the elections after few hours of the polling, claiming that there was massive rigging.

There has been a worrying decline in the state of democracy in Bangladesh. As a report by Odhikar, an ANFREL member, pointed out, “The State’s failure to recognize the basis of democracy at the founding moment is a continuing curse that people in Bangladesh are forced to carry.”

Odhikar as an organization has been struggling to ensure that internationally recognized civil and political rights are preserved for the citizens of Bangladesh. It has expressed concerns in its reports on other recent elections that they were marred by violence and irregularities.

While the chief election commissioner dubbed the electoral exercise to be free and fair, the credibility of the commission has, in the eyes of a large segment of civil society, been on a continuous decline in recent years. Reports from domestic election monitoring groups on the ground have spotlighted government forces arresting and obstructing opposition candidates from freely campaigning.

Although Odhikar was not allowed by the Commission to observe the elections, human rights groups associated with Odhikar observed the overall electoral situation and monitored the level of election related violence outside the polling centers in Dhaka North and Dhaka South City Corporations.

Some members of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) involved in media work were able to obtain permission to observe the polls in Chittagong. Odhikar also managed to collect reports from various media outlets and through coordinated communications with them.

Among the observed incidents were booth capturing by the ruling party’s supporters in many places in the capital, Dhaka. One report detailed how a local criminal managed to enter Mirpur University College polling center at 2:30 am, the night before the election, and stamp paper ballots with the clock symbol for the Awami League’s mayoral candidate, Anisul Haque.

Odhikar expressed deep concern on the persisting crisis in the electoral system of Bangladesh that hampers the country’s development. The country is now seen to be in a vulnerable position following the unresolved issues during the 10th National Parliamentary Elections in November 2014 and the irregularities and incidents of violence experienced during the Upazila Parishad elections. The nation’s electoral problems have clearly been exacerbated by the abolition of the role of a ‘caretaker’ government during national elections. The Awami League-led government, through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, abolished the practice of entrusting the government to neutral caretakers during national elections. Since then, Bangladesh has regressed into conflict and single party domination of key state institutions.

Odhikar calls for new inclusive parliamentary elections soon under a neutral caretaker government or under the supervision of the United Nations so that the people of Bangladesh can restore the democratic system based on the principles of liberty, equality, human dignity, and social justice.
Election Stakeholders in the Philippines Meet to Prepare for the 2016 Elections

Contributed by: Arturo Guerrero Liñan, Program Officer, Institute for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER)

In preparation for civil society engagement in the 2016 Philippine national and local elections, the Consortium on Electoral Reforms (CER), in partnership with the Senate Committee on Electoral Reforms and People’s Participation, the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reform and the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), held the “National Electoral Reform Summit on the 2016 National and Local Elections” from the 8th to the 10th of May 2015.

The summit included delegates from COMELEC, other pertinent government agencies, political parties, academia, and civil society and focused on preparing for the 2016 national and local elections. The summit also addressed the electoral process (plebiscite and elections) related to the Bangsamoro autonomous political entity. There were presentations from COMELEC on the preparations for the 2016 national and local elections and the implementation of an automated election system, while CER discussed the Bangsamoro electoral system, plebiscite and election.

The summit featured workshops on election administration, voter education, campaign finance regulations and implementation, election violence, party-list elections, political party reform and implementation of election campaign laws.

The Summit came up with 2 major outputs: the 2015 Summit Declaration and the Consolidated Recommendations for the 2016 National and Local Elections, both of which were submitted to the Senate Committee on Electoral Reforms and People’s Participation, the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reform and Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

Among the recommendations underscored in the declaration are the support and extensive education and training for the Automated Election System (AES), heightened security and reliability of the various AES components. It reiterated the need to immediately pass various pending political electoral reform bills such as the political party reform bill, the anti-political dynasty bill, and the Freedom of Information bill.

On the matter of Campaign Financing, the declaration reiterated its continuous support for the initiative in creating a transparency and accountability mechanism that will regulate excessive campaign spending in order to foster a more democratic electoral arena. The Summit convenors agreed to push for a broader network that will monitor on campaign spending.

It calls on COMELEC to ensure transparency in all phases of elections and to make its rules more open to citizen participation. It also calls on the international community to provide their support to the conduct of credible, free, and fair 2016 National and local elections.

View full Summit Declaration at: https://www.facebook.com/IPERph/posts/1015370905042824
Turkey Holds 24<sup>th</sup> General Elections

A general election in the Republic of Turkey was held on 7 June 2015. Voters elected 550 members to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. It was considered a historical moment for the country as the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), lost their parliamentary majority for the first time since 2002. Although it remained the party with most seats in parliament, with 258 seats, it fell far short of securing the 330 seats it needed to submit constitutional changes to a referendum. The Republican People’s Party (CHP) won 132 seats while the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) got 80 seats. The People’s Democratic Party (HDP), which previously contested elections as independents, contested this time as a party and garnered 80 seats.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which deployed a limited election observation mission (LEOM), characterized the June 7 elections as a process with high citizen participation during the campaign period and on Election Day. The conduct of elections was observed to be organized in a generally professional manner.

Source: www.nuche.net

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Sri Lanka Dissolves Parliament, Election on August 17

On June 26, Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena dissolved the country’s parliament 160 days after he assumed office early this year. Although he promised parliament dissolution 100 days after he was elected as President, delays were thought to be necessary in order to institute reforms and to mend the wounds caused by his defection to the opposition.

President Sirisena originally came from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) holding the majority in the Parliament although he ran as the opposition candidate for President through nominated by the United National Party (UNP).

The dissolution of the parliament was a welcome development as it ends the political uncertainty in Sri Lanka.

It was also announced the parliamentary elections will be held on August 17 while the new parliament is schedule to meet on September 1.
INDICATORS FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum II

Dili, Timor-Leste
18 & 19 March 2015

Preamble
Recognizing that 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;

Adhering to the principles enshrined in the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections and to the rights and principles proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration on Democracy;

Recognizing that the adoption of common indicators respecting democratic elections can help measure democratic progress and show the strengths and areas of needed improvement of each nation’s electoral processes;

Now, therefore, we, Asian electoral stakeholders from both government and civil society gathered together at the 2nd Asian Electoral Stakeholders Forum on 18 & 19 March 2015 in Dili, Timor-Leste, commit and agree to utilize the following Indicators of Democratic Elections.

I. Legal Framework
a. The overall legal framework provides for universal suffrage and guarantees basic freedoms.

b. The legal framework is consistent with international human rights instruments such as the UDHR and the ICCPR.

c. The legal framework provides for the regularity of elections, with intervals clearly defined and set out in law.

d. The legal framework provides for an inclusive process that is fair to all people of the nation without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

e. The laws governing the conduct of elections are applied impartially and without discrimination.

f. There is respect for the rule of law by all election stakeholders.

II. Level Playing Field
a. Fair Constituency Delimitation
1. Electoral constituency boundaries are drawn on the basis of the size of the population and geographic area.

b. Participation of Political Parties and Candidates
1. Requirements for political party and candidate registration are reasonable and clear.

2. Regulations for political party and candidate registration are non-discriminatory.

3. There are no legal candidate registration requirements which discriminate against persons as candidates on the basis of gender, sex, race, religion, or political views.

4. Independent candidates are allowed to compete in elections.

c. Free and Fair Campaigning
1. All political parties and candidates can campaign freely without fear of intimidation or threats of violence.

2. A code of conduct is signed by political parties and other stakeholders to commit to the prevention of election conflict and violence.

3. There is no abuse of government resources in order to advantage or disadvantage any political party or candidate.

4. Political parties and candidates are required to make detailed, timely disclosures of their campaign contributions and expenditures.

5. Appropriate sanctions are in place for violations by political parties and candidates.

d. Fair Coverage of Media
1. The media are able to freely cover campaigns and other election activities.

2. The media, both public and private, are impartial in their programming, reporting on and covering all phases of the electoral process.
III. Professional Electoral Management Body (EMB)

a. EMB as a Democratic Institution that is Independent and Impartial
1. Appointment of EMB officials is based on a just, impartial and transparent process.
2. All EMB officials and staff are professional, independent and impartial.
3. The EMB maintains transparency in the entire electoral process.
4. EMB staff is equipped with sufficient training and adequate resources to discharge their duties effectively and impartially without favoring or disfavoring any particular political party or candidate.

b. Efficient, Transparent Pre-election Preparations
1. The voter registration list is prepared in a manner free from fraud.
2. The voter registration list is available for inspection by interested groups.
3. Mechanisms to correct errors on the voter registration list are available in advance of election day.
4. Polling places are conveniently located for voters.
5. Representatives of political parties, candidates, and the public are permitted to reasonably observe the various aspects of election preparation and conduct of polls.

c. Well-organized Election Day, Free from Fraud
1. All voters are allowed to cast their votes without undue difficulty.
2. The process of balloting is implemented efficiently, transparently, without discrimination and in accordance with applicable laws.
3. The secrecy of each voter’s choices is assured.

d. There is Timely Reporting of Election Results
1. Election results are reported promptly without undue delay.

IV. Inclusive and Meaningful Participation of Citizens
a. The legal framework clearly spells out the criteria of citizens eligible to vote.

b. Any disqualifications (e.g., felony conviction, severely impaired mental faculties) for registering should be reasonable, fair and implemented without discrimination.

c. The actual process of voter registration is accessible to all eligible persons without discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, wealth, etc.

d. Voter education is sufficient to enable voters to make informed decisions about candidates and political parties.

e. Women are encouraged to participate in elections as voters and as candidates.

f. All vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and other minorities are encouraged to participate in the electoral process.

g. Local absentee voting mechanisms are provided for voters who cannot cast ballots in their assigned polling station on election day.

V. Effective, Efficient, and Impartial Electoral Justice & Electoral Dispute Resolution
a. The applicable laws provide a process for resolving disputes respecting all aspects of the electoral process.

b. The process of resolving disputes is done in an impartial, transparent, independent and timely manner consistent with respect for the rule of law.

The “Indicators For Free and Fair Elections” is a document launched during the second Asian Electoral Stakeholder Forum in Dili, Timor Leste in March 2015. It is a document reaffirming the commitment of Election Management Bodies and Civil Society Organizations to improve the quality of electoral democracy in the 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.
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

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