MYANMAR’S 2015 LANDMARK ELECTIONS

A Significant Step for Myanmar’s Democracy

WHAT’S INSIDE?

3 ANFREL Deployed LTOs and STO in Myanmar 2015 General Elections
4 Borderless Democracy: Election for Tibetans in Exile Inspires and Offers Lessons for the Future
6 ELMO Training for JPPR’s Campaign Finance Monitoring Project
7 Monitoring Campaign Finance for Indonesia’s December 9 Local Elections
8 2016 Philippine Elections: Transparent Elections — Road to Empowered Citizenry
9 Saudi Arabia Permits Voting for Women for the First Time
10 Upcoming elections
The Republic of the Union of Myanmar successfully held its first freely contested General and Local Elections in 25 years, four years after a nominally civilian government was installed in 2011. The polls were widely viewed as the heralding the end of five (5) decades of military rule.

The historic November 8 election saw a huge voter turnout, with some voters starting to queue even before sunrise. Despite some long lines, voters remained enthusiastic throughout the day.

Nobel peace prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi’s opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won in what was perceived as a landslide, picking up 86% of the contested seats in Parliament (Assembly of the Union of Myanmar). Only about 75% of the seats were up for election, as the military has retained for itself, under the constitution, which it authored, the right to name the other 25% of parliamentarians. The ruling United Solidarity Democratic Party (USDP) conceded defeat, and incumbent President Thein Sein assured the nation of a smooth transition of power to the NLD.

In an interim statement issued after the elections, ANFREL congratulated the people of Myanmar on successfully holding elections. ANFREL’s statement lauded the large voter turnout and the generally peaceful conduct of the election.

The statement added that, through the people’s determination, “they have sent the world a message that the people of Myanmar are ready and willing to work towards a more democratic future.” ANFREL also congratulated the Union Election Commission (UEC) for “its management of the election in what was admittedly an often-difficult environment. While UEC’s work is far from finished, the efforts of Polling Station staff to create an environment conducive to free and fair elections are worth noting. Given the decades since the last competitive national elections, the UEC generally performed admirably to manage the process. ANFREL is pleased to report that the improved performance of the Election Commission is one of the most significant and impactful differences when comparing this Election to the 2010 General Elections.”

Mr. Damaso Magbual, ANFREL’s Head of Mission, expanded on the statement by saying that “While important parts of the Election Process remain, the pre-election period and Election Day give Myanmar a good chance for credible elections and a more democratic future. Where irregularities exist or are alleged, ANFREL encourages the UEC and all involved stakeholders to thoroughly investigate these cases and administer justice in a professional, objective, and timely manner.”
Democratization is a process and the 2015 elections will, ANFREL hopes, serve to solidify the foundation for that process. This election, like all elections, was not perfect but ANFREL hopes that it heralds a series of continuously improving democratic elections in the country.

ANFREL’s statement also calls on all parties and candidates to work together going forward to facilitate the UEC’s investigations of complaints about election conduct, and, once the investigations have been concluded, to accept the results of the election. Those candidates that have graciously conceded defeat set a commendable example for others.

As the country gains democratic maturity, ANFREL hopes that its elections will become more inclusive. The large numbers of potential voters who were excluded or unable to participate in the process is perhaps the election’s most significant shortcoming. In the spirit of democratic inclusiveness and to advance long-term peace in the country, ANFREL advocates that steps be taken to include all the people of Myanmar, no matter their race or religion or where they happen to live, in Myanmar or abroad.

View ANFREL full statement and Preliminary Report in the following links:
ANFREL deployed a team of 20 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) and 27 Short-Term Observers (STOs) hailing from 18 different countries to observe the general and local elections. LTOs and STOs observed across the country in pairs to assess voting conditions. On Election Day, the observers monitored more than 300 polling stations across 14 states and regions.

Prior to their deployment, they were briefed in Yangon on the country’s political and electoral conditions and ANFREL’s mission plans.

LTOs started their work on October 12 and continued their efforts until November 17. STOs were deployed on November 3rd to observe the final week of the pre-election period, Election Day, and the immediate aftermath of the election.
The deployment of observers in 2015 marked a continuation of ANFREL’s long-time commitment to strengthening democracy in Myanmar by supporting the integrity of its electoral process. ANFREL has had a particular focus on Myanmar, with key resources deployed to enhance and sustain the capacity of civil society organizations and the media.

The ANFREL Election Observation Mission’s (EOM) specific objective was to strengthen Myanmar’s democratic processes by observing and reporting on the integrity of the electoral process and the accountability of election officials, candidates and political parties.

To support these goals, ANFREL chose observers coming largely from the independent civil society groups and citizen monitoring organizations that make up its network across Asia.

The observation mission was conducted pursuant to ANFREL’s standard observation methodology, which is tailored to comply with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (adopted by international organizations including the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD)), the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections, and the Dili Indicators of Democratic Elections.
ANFREL, represented by its Advocacy and Campaign Coordinator, Mr. Ryan Whelan, together with the Asian Democracy Network, and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), sent a small assessment mission to Dharamsala, India, to monitor the elections of the Tibetan Community in Exile.

Tibetans-in-exile went to polls on 18th of October to vote for the head (Sikyong) of the Central Tibetan Administration and members of the 16th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. This was the second direct general election for Sikyong and Tibetan Parliament since full devolution of political authority by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in 2011.

ADN, FORUM-ASIA, and ANFREL, in a statement, congratulated the Tibetan Community in Exile for turning out in large numbers to exercise their democratic right to vote in a peaceful and orderly manner. These three network-based organizations believe that the preliminary elections for Sikyong and Tibetan Parliament since full devolution of political authority by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in 2011.

As is true for every election, the integrity, independence, and professionalism of the Election Commission are of paramount importance. To further consolidate the culture of free and fair elections, we hope that the Election Commission will take steps to improve and more uniformly enforce its Code of Conduct.

The Election Day environment in the limited number of areas observed by the team was calm and peaceful. Polling station staff were generally professional and efficient, but in some areas, the unique openness of the preliminary round presented challenges to the smooth management of voting, and in some places, the difficult voting process led to lengthy queues.

The team in its statement expressed the hope that a system could be developed before the next preliminary elections that would simplify the process for voters, ensure the secrecy of the ballot, and speed up the voting process while allowing all voters to fully exercise their voting rights. A simpler voting method in the preliminary round would also enable the Election Commission to finish counting ballots and announce results sooner.

The democratic example set on the 18th of October by Tibetans in exile is a powerful one. The Tibetan diaspora’s building of a borderless democracy is an inspiring parallel to the Tibetan community’s broader struggle for freedom and justice. By taking necessary steps to strengthen their electoral process, Tibetans in exile will deliver a more just system for their people and further strengthen the moral example they display to the world.
ANFREL, represented by its Advocacy and Campaign Coordinator, Mr. Ryan Whelan, together with the Asian Democracy Network, and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), sent a small assessment mission to Dharamsala, India, to monitor the elections of the Tibetan Community in Exile.

Tibetans-in-exile went to polls on 18th of October to vote for the head (Sikyong) of the Central Tibetan Administration and members of the 16th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. This was the second direct general election for Sikyong and Tibetan Parliament since full devolution of political authority by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in 2011.

ADN, FORUM-ASIA, and ANFREL, in a statement, congratulated the Tibetan Community in Exile for turning out in large numbers to exercise their democratic right to vote in a peaceful and orderly manner. These network-based organizations believe that the preliminary elections for Sikyong and Tibetan Parliament in Exile and the lessons learned from them will result in another important step towards consolidating democracy for the Tibetan Community.

The 2015 Preliminary Election saw members of the Tibetan diaspora engage more actively and deeply in the electoral process, as evidenced by the more vigorous debate, discussion, and campaigning that took place during the pre-election period and by the long queues of voters patiently waiting their turn to vote on October 18th, the election day. ANFREL believes that the people’s deeper engagement in the political process is a positive sign that should be embraced and further encouraged during the run up to the 20 March 2016 Second Round of Elections.

The Election Commission (EC) of the Central Tibetan Administration had to work in a difficult environment to manage the preliminary round of the election. Given the stateless diaspora’s spread across the globe, the inclusive nature of the Election Commission’s organization of voting in more small communities of Tibetans than in the past is admirable and worthy of emulation by much larger and more established election commissions in other countries.

As is true for every election, the integrity, independence, and professionalism of the Election Commission are of paramount importance. To further consolidate the culture of free and fair elections, we hope that the Election Commission will take steps to improve and more uniformly enforce its Code of Conduct.

The Election Day environment in the limited number of areas observed by the team was calm and peaceful. Polling station staff were generally professional and efficient, but in some areas, the unique openness of the preliminary round presented challenges to the smooth management of voting, and, in some places, the difficult voting process led to lengthy queues.

The team in its statement expressed the hope that a system could be developed before the next preliminary elections that would simplify the process for voters, ensure the secrecy of the ballot, and speed up the voting process while allowing all voters to fully exercise their voting rights. A simpler voting method in the preliminary round would also enable the Election Commission to finish counting ballots and announce results sooner.

The democratic example set on the 18th of October by Tibetans in exile is a powerful one. The Tibetan diaspora’s building of a borderless democracy is an inspiring parallel to the Tibetan community’s broader struggle for freedom and justice. By taking necessary steps to strengthen their electoral process, Tibetans in exile will deliver a more just system for their people and further strengthen the moral example they display to the world.

As is true for every election, the integrity, independence, and professionalism of the Election Commission are of paramount importance. To further consolidate the culture of free and fair elections, we hope that the Election Commission will take steps to improve and more uniformly enforce its Code of Conduct.

The Election Day environment in the limited number of areas observed by the team was calm and peaceful. Polling station staff were generally professional and efficient, but in some areas, the unique openness of the preliminary round presented challenges to the smooth management of voting, and, in some places, the difficult voting process led to lengthy queues.

The team in its statement expressed the hope that a system could be developed before the next preliminary elections that would simplify the process for voters, ensure the secrecy of the ballot, and speed up the voting process while allowing all voters to fully exercise their voting rights. A simpler voting method in the preliminary round would also enable the Election Commission to finish counting ballots and announce results sooner.

The democratic example set on the 18th of October by Tibetans in exile is a powerful one. The Tibetan diaspora’s building of a borderless democracy is an inspiring parallel to the Tibetan community’s broader struggle for freedom and justice. By taking necessary steps to strengthen their electoral process, Tibetans in exile will deliver a more just system for their people and further strengthen the moral example they display to the world.
ELMO TRAINING FOR JPPR’S CAMPAIGN
FINANCE MONITORING PROJECT

ANFREL facilitated training and discussions from October 1 until October 4, 2015 for its member organization in Indonesia, the People’s Voters Education Network (JPPR), on the use of ELMO. JPPR launched a campaign to monitor campaign expenditures of candidates contesting in the synchronized local elections. This marks the first time ELMO was to be used for monitoring candidates’ campaign finance activities.

Most JPPR members welcomed the introduction of the new technology. They were optimistic that with new technologies, work for election monitors would become more efficient.

ELMO, or the Election Monitoring Data Collection and Analysis Software System, is an open-source data collection and reporting system (software) developed by the Carter Center and built specifically with election monitoring in mind. With ELMO, volunteers can submit reports via Android tablets or smartphones, SMS, or directly online, in real time to a central location. ELMO’s reporting system helps collate and organize observers’ findings, helps analyze large amount of data, and helps in assessing elections and other political processes.

In early 2015, ANFREL signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Carter Center on the use of ELMO. After ANFREL pilot-tested the system in the Sri Lanka parliamentary elections in August 2015, some of its member organizations expressed an interest in trying the software for domestic monitoring, one of the first of which was JPPR.

ANFREL program officer Kristina Uy Gadaingan visited Jakarta to assist JPPR in implementing the ELMO system and provided training for its national secretariat and coordinators on using ELMO to monitor, submit and analyze campaign finance reports.
On December 9, 2015, the first synchronized local elections were held in 31 provinces in Indonesia. Nine (9) governorships, 224 regent positions, and 36 mayoral positions were contested.

The elections are the first of three rounds to elect local heads of government in the country’s 34 provinces and 514 regencies/municipalities. The second round of elections is scheduled for February 2017, and the third round is scheduled for June 2018.

Indonesia’s regional election process is administered by its General Election Commission (KPU), which had to manage tens of thousands of polling stations and oversee the tabulation of votes between December 9 and December 18. The applicable law also provides for an electoral dispute resolution process overseen by the nation’s Constitutional Court to resolve electoral disputes between December 18 and March 13, 2016. Disputes that were filed after the elections are still in the process of being resolved.

Meanwhile, the number of women candidates seeking to head local governments reached an all-time high of seven percent. Similarly, the number of independent candidates reached a new high of 16 percent.

To encourage transparency and accountability among candidates, political parties, and the election management body (EMB), People Voter's Education Network/Jaringan Pendidikan Pemilih Untuk Rakyat (JPPR) launched a pioneering effort in the country to monitor campaign finance.

The monitoring, which ran from September 10, 2015, endeavored to assess the transparency and compliance with campaign finance reporting by regional candidates. The undertaking also endeavored to raise awareness among voters by disseminating information regarding the candidates’ compliance with the rules and regulations.

JPPR focused its monitoring in 5 cities (South Tangerang, Semarang, Depok, Palu and Balikpapan) and 3 regencies (Jember, Bantul, Maros and Seluma).

JPPR monitored finances by reviewing campaign finance reports submitted by candidates and checking their accuracy, timeliness, and compliance with the regulations. A total number of 18 trained volunteers from these localities participated in workshops and training before undertaking the monitoring. JPPR also pilot-tested the use of ELMO with the support of ANFREL.

Among the major findings of JPPR are the following: first, the majority of revenues came from the candidates' own contributions. This indicates that the campaigns were financed by the candidates themselves. The level of contributions by political parties was much lower than the level of the candidates' own contributions. Second, through JPPR's monitoring of actual campaign activities, it was found that campaign finance reports of the candidates did not reflect all of the costs incurred. Review of available information revealed that the reported amounts were below the real costs incurred. Third, candidate pairs failed to use a single account to receive revenues and pay campaign expenses. Without specially created accounts to handle all receipts and expenditures, there was no way to accurately reflect the flow of revenues and expenditures of running mates (eg. Mayor and Vice-Mayor).

JPPR prepared recommendations, which the group submitted to Bawaslu (Election Supervisory Board of the Republic of Indonesia). Bawaslu is the Election Management Body tasked to supervise violations of the election law.
On December 9, 2015, the first synchronized local elections were held in 31 provinces in Indonesia. Nine (9) governorships, 224 regent positions, and 36 mayoral positions were contested.

The elections are the first of three rounds to elect local heads of government in the country’s 34 provinces and 514 regencies/municipalities. The second round of elections is scheduled for February 2017, and the third round is scheduled for June 2018.

Indonesia’s regional election process is administered by its General Election Commission (KPU), which had to manage tens of thousands of polling stations and oversee the tabulation of votes between December 9 and December 18. The applicable law also provides for an electoral dispute resolution process overseen by the nation’s Constitutional Court to resolve electoral disputes between December 18 and March 13, 2016. Disputes that were filed after the elections are still in the process of being resolved.

Meanwhile, the number of women candidates seeking to head local governments reached an all-time high of seven percent. Similarly, the number of independent candidates reached a new high of 16 percent.

To encourage transparency and accountability among candidates, political parties, and the election management body (EMB), People Voter’s Education Network/Jaringan Pendidikan Pemilih Untuk Rakyat (JPPR) launched a pioneering effort in the country to monitor campaign finance.

The monitoring, which ran from September 10, 2015, endeavored to assess the transparency and compliance with campaign finance reporting by regional candidates. The undertaking also endeavored to raise awareness among voters by disseminating information regarding the candidates’ compliance with the rules and regulations. JPPR focused its monitoring in 5 cities (South Tangerang, Semarang, Depok, Palu and Balikpapan) and 3 regencies (Jember, Bantul, Maros and Seluma).

JPPR monitored finances by reviewing campaign finance reports submitted by candidates and checking their accuracy, timeliness, and compliance with the regulations. A total number of 18 trained volunteers from these localities participated in workshops and training before undertaking the monitoring. JPPR also pilot-tested the use of ELMO with the support of ANFREL.

Among the major findings of JPPR are the following: first, the majority of revenues came from the candidates’ own contributions. This indicates that the campaigns were financed by the candidates themselves. The level of contributions by political parties was much lower than the level of the candidates’ own contributions. Second, through JPPR’s monitoring of actual campaign activities, it was found that campaign finance reports of the candidates did not reflect all of the costs incurred. Review of available information revealed that the reported amounts were below the real costs incurred. Third, candidate pairs failed to use a single account to receive revenues and pay campaign expenses. Without specially created accounts to handle all receipts and expenditures, there was no way to accurately reflect the flow of revenues and expenditures of running mates (eg. Mayor and Vice-Mayor) or Indonesia, they are referred to as “candidate pairs”

JPPR prepared recommendations, which the group submitted to Bawaslu (Election Supervisory Board of the Republic of Indonesia. Bawaslu is the Election Management Body tasked to supervise violations of the election law.
2016 PHILIPPINE ELECTIONS: TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS – ROAD TO EMPOWERED CITIZENRY

Damaso G. Magbual
Chairperson, ANFREL
Membership Committee Chairperson, NAMFREL

The Asia Society sponsored a forum on Electoral Integrity on November 25, 2015 at the ballroom of the Makati Residences, Makati City. The Asia Society organized the forum as part of its continuing efforts to empower the Filipino voter so s/he can make the right decisions come election time. Invited as resource persons were Atty. Andres Bautista, Chairman of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), and Mr. Damaso Magbual, Chairman of the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and member of the National Council of the National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL).

Bautista presented the parameters or “scorecard” as he called them by which the COMELEC will assess its performance in the 2016 national elections. The bottom line is to make the coming elections more credible than the last two elections using the same controversial Precint Count Optical Scan (PCOS) machines.

Bautista further emphasized the role of social media and youth “as the game changer for the 2016 national elections.” He also talked about COMELEC’s plan to have polling stations in shopping malls as a measure to decongest the school houses as well as a convenient voting place for persons with disabilities.

Magbual talked about the role of observers in promoting electoral transparency and integrity. “Transparency calls on the election body to open itself to scrutiny in all stages of the electoral process,” Magbual said. He reminded the participants that election observers are guided by a set of principles that are universally accepted in the process of monitoring an election. He cited the Bangkok Declaration as a document that serves as a guidepost for election observers.

Asked his views on the Automated Election System, Magbual said that “because our electoral system is so different from our neighbors where we vote for as many as 38 candidates/parties on a 27-inch ballot, there is a need to automate”. However, he stressed that “before you automate, there should first be voter confidence in the system chosen. And the necessary safeguards must be in place to ensure the integrity of the count.”

The forum was attended by business executives, academicians, media practitioners, CSO heads and students from selected universities in Manila.
HONG KONG SEES HUGE TURNOUT IN LOCAL DISTRICT ELECTIONS

District council elections in Hong Kong were held on 22 November 2015 for all 18 districts. The turnout was considered historic, as it featured one of the highest voter turnouts ever, at 47%.

Around 900 candidates contested a total of 431 district seats. The pro-Beijing camp won the majority but eight pro-democracy candidates who were involved the Umbrella movement in 2014 also gained seats.

A district council’s main function is to advise the government on matters affecting the well being of the people, provision and use of public facilities and services, government programs, and use of public funds.

Members of District Councils hold 4-year terms. The newly elected members took office on 1 January 2016.

SAUDI ARABIA PERMITS VOTING FOR WOMEN FOR THE FIRST TIME

For the first time, women in the Islamic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were able to participate in an electoral exercise both as voters and candidates in the municipal elections held on 12 December 2015.

Although women’s rights in socially conservative Saudi Arabia are still limited, this first step to opening suffrage is a welcome development. The municipal elections saw the election of 18 women candidates in various parts of the country. The elections were for two-thirds of the seats in the municipal councils. The role of municipal councils is limited to handling local affairs such as maintenance of streets and public gardens.

Photo Source: http://time.com/4149557/saudi-arabia-elections-women-vote/
TAIWAN GENERAL ELECTIONS 2016
(16 JANUARY 2016)

Taiwan’s January elections will determine the 14th President and Vice-President as well as members of the 9th Legislative Yuan (Parliament).

Two major political parties are contesting for the elections, the incumbent Koumintang Party (KMT) and the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Another candidate from the people First Party (PFP) is also contesting for the Presidential post.

PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS (9 MAY 2016)

On May 9, 2016, the Philippines will hold national and local elections. Voters will choose the next President and Vice-President and choose members of the legislative branch – the Senate and the House of Representatives. Positions for local government will also be filled at the polls.

The Philippines has a multi-party system. Candidates will represent the various political parties, while some will be running as independents.

Aspiring candidates have already submitted their respective certificates of candidacy to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), which is now in the process of reviewing candidacy papers to determine which candidates meet the qualifications to have their names listed on the ballot.

Ballots will be customized down to the most basic constituency since the Philippines adopted the use of the Automated Election System – Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS).
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 working on the promotion of electoral democracy through election monitoring, capacity building, and campaign and advocacy. 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, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Thailand.

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

With Support from: