PRESS RELEASE
March 17, 2021

RISING UP TO A CHALLENGING AND
CHANGING ELECTORAL LANDSCAPE

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) wishes to congratulate the people of Palawan province for turning up to vote in the Palawan Plebiscite last Saturday, March 13, 2021. Despite the inclement weather and the ongoing pandemic, Palaweños trooped to the polling places to make their voices heard, with a noteworthy 60% voter turnout given the challenges.

NAMFREL also congratulates the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) for a job well done, in a province that is geographically challenging. NAMFREL notes improvements in Comelec's operations as a response to a changed electoral landscape, from regular online briefings with election stakeholders and the general public, to establishing Isolation Polling Places (IPPs) and Accessible Polling Places (APPs) in the voting centers. In NAMFREL's observation, Comelec's anti-Covid measures for voting day were appropriate, adequately enforced, and generally adhered to by voters and polling staff. While there are rooms for improvement, NAMFREL believes that the Comelec was able to rise up to the challenge of holding a safe and secure electoral exercise in the midst of a pandemic. The turnout of voters is also reflective of the people's confidence that they will be safe and protected if they participate in the plebiscite.
NAMFREL also lauds the efforts of its Palawan observers for their continuous commitment to clean and honest elections, for being able to organize despite the short time given and the logistical challenges, for turning up early at the voting centers on plebiscite day and following the process until final tally at the provincial canvassing center, and for continuously working through this post-plebiscite period.

Upon accreditation by the Comelec, NAMFREL deployed observers in different municipalities of Palawan to observe pre-plebiscite, plebiscite day, and post-plebiscite day activities. Observers were guided by observation forms that focused not just on the electoral process itself, but also on the effectiveness of the implementation of anti-Covid protocols. NAMFREL will be submitting a report to the Comelec on the findings of the observation, identifying areas that could be further strengthened, and recommending measures to help ensure the conduct of a safer 2022 National and Local Elections (NLE). NAMFREL hopes that this participation and contribution to Comelec's efforts would help improve voter confidence, and eventually increase the number of Filipinos who would register for and vote in the 2022 NLE. ###