



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS RELEASE

NAMFREL Bantay ng Bayan UPDATE #2 September 17, 2022, 9:30pm

NAMFREL releases update on its observations on the conduct of the 2022 Maguindanao Plebiscite

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released a second update on its observations on the conduct of the September 17, 2022 Maguindanao Plebiscite. NAMFREL was accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as citizens' arm for the plebiscite, and it deployed more than a hundred volunteers in voting centers in the different municipalities of Maguindanao. The second update cover the closing and counting processes in the polling places as well as the municipal canvassing that is still ongoing in some municipalities as of writing. Observations are being sent in by authorized NAMFREL observers electronically and through paper forms.

In general, NAMFREL volunteers describe the conduct of the closing, counting, and canvassing processes as very smooth, peaceful, and transparent.

During the counting process, almost all observations noted that watchers and members of the public had an unimpeded view of the ballots as the results were being read. Observers also noted that they also had an unimpeded view of the election returns and tally sheets awhile counting was ongoing.

NAMFREL volunteers also described the municipal canvassing process as smooth and peaceful. However, volunteers noted that Covid-related protocols, especially the prescribed 1-meter physical distancing and the proper wearing of face masks, were not properly enforced and followed.

Outside canvassing centers, such as in Datu Odin Sinsuat, volunteers observed that some Plebiscite Committees (PlebComs) opted to complete the administrative tasks of completing and signing the reports and sealing the reports and results of the voting in respective envelopes at the compound of the municipal hall, since they did not want to be left at the voting centers or finish the tasks as darkness started to set in.

Volunteers also heard from some PlebCom members that they were hoping that their honorarium will not be subjected to VAT since some of them had started as early as 1AM on plebiscite day to retrieve the election paraphernalia from the municipal treasurer's office, travel to their respective voting centers (some at quite a distance),

perform their tasks on plebiscite day, deliver and turn over the election results to COMELEC and other election paraphernalia to the municipal treasurer's office.

NAMFREL will continue to follow the canvassing process, including the provincial canvassing tomorrow, Sunday, Sept. 18, in Buluan, Maguindanao. Provincial canvassing convened at 6pm tonight to receive canvass reports, but COMELEC said it will suspend proceedings at 9pm, and will resume proceedings at 8am tomorrow. The provincial canvassing board, however, will continue to receive municipal canvass results. Also according to the COMELEC, far flung municipalities may opt to submit their canvass results tomorrow. NAMFREL expects to receive more observations in the coming hours and days from its volunteers, especially from those deployed to remote areas. 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 safer and more efficient electoral exercises.
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