



The Centre for Democratic Institutions

**INDONESIAN CIVIL SOCIETY STUDY TOUR
OBSERVING ELECTION MONITORING IN THE PHILIPPINES
HOSTED BY NAMFREL**

Project Origins

The genesis of this project arose from discussions between Dr Sharon Bessell, formerly Executive Officer, CDI and Mr Laoc Telibert, NAMFREL national coordinator. Dr Bessell had observed the 1999 Indonesian elections including the important role played by Indonesian civil society. NAMFREL has been the leading force in citizen involvement in election monitoring in the Philippines since 1983. Indonesian civil society leaders interested in election monitoring could therefore benefit from seeing NAMFREL at work.

CDI funded the program and NAMFREL appointed Attorney Josefina Castro as visit coordinator. NAMFREL does not accept contributions from foreign organizations and no fee was charged for NAMFREL's considerable work in managing the program.

Valuable advice was obtained from the National Democratic Institute in the United States, which had conducted a similar program.

The selection of the Indonesian participants was undertaken by Professor Azyumardi Azra, Rector of the State Institute for Islamic Studies in Jakarta. The civil society groups from which participants were chosen included those involved in election monitoring, voter education and media analysis.

Program Outline

The program consisted of briefings and observation. The purpose was not to formally observe the Philippine Congressional elections of 14 May but to see how NAMFREL operated and to compare the experience with the 1999 Indonesian election observation. The briefings covered the election system, election administration and election monitoring. Senior NAMFREL officials participated in the briefing but, regrettably, officials from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) were unable to provide briefings as requested.

The observation phase was conducted with 5 local NAMFREL chapters in Metro Manila each hosting two Indonesian visitors. All the Indonesian visitors had been formally designated as election observers to allow them access to the polling places.

The observation phase allowed the visitors to see how electoral officials prepared the polling places, how the vote was conducted and how the count was undertaken.

Observation of the Quick Count process at the NAMFREL National Tabulation Center allowed the visitors to see how information was obtained and authenticated from this vast archipelago, the country most similar geographically to Indonesia. The observers were able to witness the many difficulties inherent in such an exercise. Computer glitches are virtually inevitable but NAMFREL had the people on hand to deal with problems. Illegible returns were a common problem as NAMFREL was receiving the sixth copy prepared with carbon paper. Another problem was food poisoning of NAMFREL volunteers at the National Tabulation Center caused by contaminated sandwiches. This occurred even though it is a NAMFREL rule that volunteers accept no food from outside sources.

The positive aspects included the dedication of the volunteers many of whom were from faith-based organizations. The visitors were also able to see the respect in which NAMFREL is held in the Philippines and the authoritativeness of its results. There were also important precedents for Indonesia in communications procedures with the many outlying islands.

Assessment

One of the difficulties of conducting this sort of comparative work is that it requires some familiarity with the political system being observed. The free media in the Philippines was an excellent source of news and opinion and some newspapers have good web editions. The briefing sessions also helped to fill in holes. But the visitors for a short visit such as this are unable to become expert on the politics, electoral rules and social meaning of the process. Nevertheless, the participants picked up sufficient information to be able to make some quite sophisticated comparative observations at the debriefing session.

The issues at play in these Congressional elections were mainly related to the replacement of President Estrada by President Arroyo and the subsequent arrest of the former President on corruption charges. This aspect tended to overwhelm other issues as both sides employed a similar political rhetoric. The personality based nature of the election and the absence of a policy debate reflected similarities in Indonesia. But the dynastic nature of Philippine politics was not generally seen in Indonesia though, in Megawati, there was an obvious exception. Also the celebrityocracy that was developing in the Philippines in the form of actors and sports stars running for office has no current parallel in Indonesia.

The conduct of the elections in the Philippines appeared less orderly to the Indonesian visitors than elections in their own country. The death toll was high (approaching 70 in the course of the campaign). The electoral laws on distribution of publicity material, display of posters and presence unauthorized persons at the polling places were routinely ignored in the Philippines. The voting procedures tended to differ in small ways from one polling place to the next. There was little privacy and thus little secrecy for the voters.

Positive observations by the Indonesian observers included the way the election process was fully in the hands of the Philippine people with very little foreign

involvement. The visitors saw the strength of the civil society movement involved in election monitoring as its grass roots support and volunteer base. The sponsorship of the business community of these civil society groups was seen as positive in that they were acknowledged openly. The ability of the Philippine civil society movement to network among each other was seen as another strength. Another feature that was admired by the visitors was the autonomy given to the local NAMFREL chapters. Indonesian instincts under Suharto's New Order had been to centralize all the various processes and this instinct remained. Finally, the involvement of women in the election process was commented on favourably. The large majority of teachers conducting the poll and observers monitoring it were women.

While there had been the inevitable program changes and while some of the visitors had wished to be more formally involved as election observers, the overall response to the project was very positive with many ideas emerging that might be useful in Indonesia and good contacts made with Philippine civil society leaders.

In hindsight, the major problem with the design of the project was the pressure it put on NAMFREL. NAMFREL's responsibilities are at their greatest in an election period and its volunteers had to give their attention to their core business. Yet the only time that NAMFREL can be observed in action is during the election period. Credit for the success of the project must therefore go to Attorney Josefina Castro for her commitment and devotion to ensure that the visitors had a fulfilling experience.

PROGRAM

- Thursday 10 May* *Facilitated discussion session*
Philippine Elections
0900-1000 Philippine Election System and Procedures
1000-1030 Specifics on the 14 May 2001 Elections
1030-1200 Election Administration
1300-1500 Role of Civil Society in Philippine Elections
- Friday 11 May* *Facilitated discussion session*
National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL)
0900-1000 Rational/Objectives
1000-1100 Structure and Operations
1100-1200 Recruitment and Training of Volunteers
1300-1400 Poll-watching
1400-1530 Operation Quick Count
- Saturday 12 May* *Observation*
1430-1730 Observe briefing session for volunteers, White Cross, San Juan
- Sunday 13 May* *Observation*
1500-1830 Observe National Tabulation Centre, Greenhills
- Monday 14 May* *Observation of Election Monitoring*
0430-0500 Briefing drivers

0500-0600 Travel to different local NAMFREL Chapters as follows
Marikina – Yulianti Asther, Andi Syahputra
Antipolo – Fransisca Rarassari, Edward Omar Sharif
Pasig – Mohamed Firdau, Raden Dwiprasetyo
Muntinlupa – Burhanudin, Nong Darol Mahmada
NAMFREL National – Renta Nababan, Rudy Harisyah Alam
- Tuesday 15 May* *Immersion and Observation of Elections and Operation Quick
Count with Respective NAMFREL Local Chapters*
- Wednesday 16 May* *Observation at National Tabulation Center, La Salle,
Greenhills*
- Thursday 17 May* *Debriefing/Feedback with Cora Ignatio and Roland Rich*
- Friday 18 May* *Departure for Indonesia*

LIST OF INDONESIAN PARTICIPANTS

No	Name	Organization	Office Address	Contact Nos.
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3	Mr. Edward Omar Sharif Hiariej	Parliament Watch Indonesia (ParWI), Yogyakarta	Faculty of Law, Gadjah Mada University, Jl. Sosio Justisia No. 1, Bulaksumur, Yogyakarta 55281, INDONESIA	Ph. (62-274) 512-781
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