

Mindanao: New System of Elections, Same type of Electoral Violence, Old Faces of Winners

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Fast election results, early proclamations. This has been the order of the day 72 hours after election day. The much dreaded cases of Failure of Elections or No Elections which many expected did not happen. Chief of Staff Delfin Bangit of the Philippine Army had this smug look on his face seemingly wanting to say, I-told-you-so to his detractors. He has been openly declaring that he will support the Constitution and that he will not allow for an extension of GMA's term.

Yet, despite the early results that many are now raving at, stories of violence and electoral fraud are ripe in many areas, not only in Mindanao but as well as different areas in the Visayas and Luzon. That, even until now, these places still has to transmit their election results.

The Interfaith Movement for Peaceful Elections (Im4Peace), an aggrupation of different groups and individuals with membership coming from Zamboanga del Sur, Pagadian City, the twin Provinces of Lanao, Iligan City, Maguindanao, Cotabato City and Sultan Kudarat, collaborating with the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and the media, in monitoring the elections is more worried on the seeming complacency and short-sightedness with which many sections of the society are viewing the election results. Everyone is so agog on replacing GMA that to see Noynoy Aquino swiftly leading the Presidential pack with a very wide margin against his opponents has somehow lulled the people into believing that everything is in order with the recent elections.

In Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lanao del Norte there were some areas where people were no longer able to vote. One Im4Peace volunteer who was excited to vote for the first Automated Election System traveled very early on Sunday morning from Cotabato City to go home to her hometown. She encouraged her family and neighbors to go to the polling place early on election day. They even discussed on the candidates whom they would vote and painstakingly prepared the list of their choices. But, their eagerness was doused when they were not given their ballots. They were just asked by the BEI to sign in the Voters List. She has to go home to Lanao Norte and spend hard-earned money for her transportation only to get disenfranchised. The pre-shading of ballots was replicated in Malabang, Lanao Sur. According to one volunteer from the place, BEIs brought home the ballots on the eve before the elections and distributed them to voters already shaded.

Another volunteer in Matuber, Datu Blah Sinsuat, a coastal town in Maguindanao was a victim of election manipulation. They were told to vote straight for a certain local party. The volunteer related that while she queued to vote, she hid her own list of candidates. But an old lady openly refused to vote for Andal Ampatuan, Sr., the vice gubernatorial candidate of the said party. She cried so hard that she got her ballot wet with her tears. The PCOS machine rejected her tear-stained ballot.

In Benuan, Kuya, one of the barangays in South Upi, BEIs gave priority numbers to loyalists of a certain gubernatorial candidates. Thus, out of the more than 2,000 registered voters, only more than 900 were able to vote. Election results still have to be transmitted as the PCOS machines broke down. In another barangay, in Pilar, South Upi, presence of armed men associated with a local

candidate was highly visible near the polling place. Supporters of other local candidates are presently staging a protest to prevent the delivery of the results claiming that the election was rigged in favor of Ombra Sinsuat and Andal Ampatuan, Sr.

Two voters from Datu Odin Sinsuat tearfully called local radio DXMS complaining that their ballots were already pre-shaded, specifically for the space for Governor.

In Pagadian City, massive vote buying was witnessed by volunteers. BEIs serving the elections were either related or supporters of the ruling Cerilles couple. While in some areas in Maguindanao, SMARTMATIC technicians were either related or recommended by local politicians.

Meanwhile, a member of the International Observer Mission- COMPACT for Peaceful and Honest Elections shared that in the following polling places in Maguindanao: Broce Central School, Shariff Aguak Elem School, Ampatuan Elementary School, Datu Luminog Mangilin Elementray School, Kurentin Elementary School and Datu Paglas, Elementary School, PCOS machines malfunctioned, used ballots piled atop the ballot boxes, BEIs are without IDs, voters list tattered , no verification of voters were done, some voters not on the list, among other irregularities.

The election results in the first twenty-four hours after elections seemed a bursting dam. But now, election results came in trickles as election results in problematic areas cannot be transmitted for one reason or another. In most areas where winners were already proclaimed, old faces still dominate. While there is a new system of elections, it didn't usher in new and fresh faces to serve our government.

Senators leading the senate race are dominated by old time politicians with the exemption of Hontiveros and Guingona. The House of Representatives may have a handful of new faces but it's still dominated with traditional politicians and political dynasties. Much more so in the local government units, where electoral violence is more prevalent, political dynasties and warlords still have a strong hold on their respective domains.

For GMA's part, while everyone was busy with the elections, she sneaked in an appointment for a new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, despite the apparent no vacancy of the position. Chief Justice Reynato Puno still has to retire this coming May 17, 2010. GMA could have very well left the appointment of the new Chief Justice to the incoming president, but she didn't.

So, one would wonder, can Noynoy really bring in our much longed change and hope for this government?

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