

AKBAYAN bares “administration fronts” in the party-list race

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Is the government persecuting anti-GMA party-lists to ensure the victory of its “front organizations?”

This was the question raised by Akbayan party-list today as it revealed that several administration-backed groups, from Sigaw ng Bayan members to those that have been initiated by government officials, have been accredited by the Commission on Elections. AKBAYAN Party-list appealed to the Commission on Elections to get its act together and revisit its list of accredited party-list organizations and parties that the poll body has allowed to run under the list system in May’s elections.

“We welcome pluralism but the accreditation of dubious and administration-backed groups to run under the party-list system makes a mockery of the law and the reasons for which the system was created in the first place,” said Akbayan Rep. Etta Rosales. “We challenge the COMELEC to show proof that it conducted evidentiary hearings to provide enough basis to allow these spurious groups to run in the elections.”

“In its June 26, 2001 decision in *Ang Bagong Bayani-OFW v. COMELEC, et.al.* (G.R. No. 147589, June 26, 2001), the Supreme Court ordered the COMELEC to evaluate if the party-list participants in the 2001 elections met its 8-point guidelines,” recalled Rosales. “We want to know if these guidelines were observed in the accreditation process.”

“This was the very same guidelines that led to the disqualification of MAD, VFP, Lakas-NUCD, NPC and PROMDI in 2001,” added political analyst and Akbayan Chairperson Joel Rocamora. “These guidelines tell us that it’s not enough that two or three ambitious proxies get together and run for Congress, there must be incontrovertible proof that they represent a constituency of marginalized and oppressed sectors.”

“At the same time the COMELEC must look deeper into reports that some of these party-list groups are backed by government officials and offices, which is in violation of the same 2001 Supreme Court ruling,” said Rocamora, “which said that the party or organization must not be an adjunct of, or a project organized or an entity funded or assisted by, the government.”

Atty. Byron Bocar, AKBAYAN legal counsel, said that the law is very clear on the participation of government officials in partisan activities. “Article IX-B, Section 2 of the Philippine Constitution says that no officer or employee in the civil service may participate in electioneering or any other partisan activity,” pointed out Atty Bocar, “but we have received reports that some party-list groups are being backed by government institutions such as the Office of External Affairs which was also behind the doomed initiative of Sigaw ng Bayan.”

“Ahon Pinoy OFW Party for example is headed by Director Nikon Fameronag of the Department of Labor and Employment’s (DOLE) Information and Publication Service (IPS). It is allegedly being supported by Sec. Dante Ang, whose son is the number one nominee of Ahon, while Aangat Tayo has Philippine International Trading Corporation (PITC) Pharma Executive Vice President Teddie Elson

Rivera as its head. Another group called AGBIAG has Marcelo Farinas II, Malacanang's Secretary for External Affairs as the group's Secretary-General," said Atty. Bocar. "What are these government officials doing fronting these groups?"

"Meanwhile, some of these groups including Babae Ka and Ang Kasangga are also led by people involved with Sigaw ng Bayan, whose people's initiative was admitted by its own leaders as an unqualified support for the administration's agenda," pointed out Rosales. "So while on the surface these groups purportedly represent the poor and marginalized, they may actually be just using the party-list system as a back-channel to get into Congress and firm up support for a beleaguered administration," added the lady solon.

"The COMELEC should avoid a repeat of the long drawn-out legal battles in previous elections where genuine party-list groups were unable to take their seats in Congress despite being declared as having attained the minimum percentage required for a seat in the House," said Rosales. "Should these parties win and their victories are challenged it would mean delayed proclamations for other party-list bets because their votes will affect the percentages acquired by winning party-lists," she explained.

"But the principle behind the party-list is the graver sin that is being violated here," added Rocamora. "RA 7941 or the party-list act aims to give a voice to those who are otherwise excluded from the decision-making processes of our institutions, as provided in the Constitution. But with the government interfering, the party-list system is being undermined and weakened when it should be strengthened to allow more marginalized voices to get heard in Congress."

Questionable Newly Accredited Party-list Organizations

Sigaw ng Bayan Groups

- **Babae Ka!** - Sigaw ng Bayan Member (Pro Peoples Initiative group). The group has links with Malacanang's Office of External Affairs (OEA). In the recent SWS survey, it has a threshold rating of 1.5 %

- **Ang Kasangga**- Has links with the Office of External Affairs (OEA) of Malacanang, the government office behind Sigaw ng Bayan. It is also associated with the Beta Sigma Fraternity. Its president is FORMER Assemblyman Jose Tumbokon. He started his career as messenger, rose through the ranks and served as chief of office before he became assemblyman and presidential adviser. He was appointed minister of state of information and official spokesperson of the Interim Batasan Pambansa and the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan during the Marcos regime.

- **Akbay Pinoy**- Its Chairman is Bong Guro. This group is also a member of Sigaw ng Bayan. It was legally charged by Makati residents together with Sigaw ng Bayan for manufacturing signatures for the GMA administration's People's Initiative.

- **AKSA**- Aksyon Sambayanan (AkSa) is a phony social democratic movement affiliated with the government ally Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP). Norberto Gonzales and its Secretary General Beth Angsioco head it.

Initiated by government officials or traditional politicians

- **KAKUSA** - Its Chairman Emeritus is convicted child rapist and former Zamboanga del Norte Representative Romeo Jalosjos. It is represented by its national president, R. Dodong Canonigo. The Lamb of God Foundation, an outreach program for elderly inmates established by Jalosjos, is supporting it.
- **AHON PINOY OFW Party** - backed up by Dante Ang, Chairman of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas and CEO of the Manila Times. The Number One nominee of Ahon is "Klink" Ang, son of Danter Ang. It has a 1.2% threshold rating in the recent SWS survey. Its president is Director Nicon Fameronag of the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) Information and Publication Service (IPS) (2003). He is also a member of ONE VOICE.
- **Biyaheng Pinoy**- An association of tricycle drivers, Arsenio Abalos sits as director and national council member of the party. Who is Arsenio Abalos? The elder brother of COMELEC chairman Benjamin Abalos. Also, The group was founded and is chaired by Mandaluyong Vice-Mayor Jesus Cruz, who claimed to be a tricycle operator before.
- **ANAD**- was formed in February 2003 by the National Alliance for Democracy (NAD), the movement that supplanted the dreaded Alsa Masa, a vigilante group organized by the government in Davao. NAD serves as the umbrella organization for all anti-communist forces in the country. In 2004, NAD registered ANAD as its party-list group.
- **AANGAT TAYO**- Philippine International Trading Corporation (PITC) Pharma Executives Vice President Teddie Elson Rivera is the group's president. PITC is a government-owned international trading company with over thirty years experience in the export, import and marketing of a wide range of commodities, industrial products and consumer goods.
- In August of 2004, **PITC** was designated as a key agency in the implementation of the GMA's 10-point legacy, which includes the lowering of the prices of essential medicines by 50%, by 2010. PITC is also in charged of importing medicines for GMA's Botika ng Bayan.
- Aangat ang Kabuhayan (**ANAK**) -Its number one nominee is Supt. Eduardo Octaviano of the Philippine National Police (PNP) National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO).
- **AGBIAG!**- Marcelo Farinas II, Malacanang's Secretary for External Affairs is the group's Secretary-General. Agbiag enjoys the backing of Chavit Singson.