aeswatch 2010

aesWatch Conveners'
shared concern:
TRANSPARENT AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

...includes University of the Philippines Alumni Association (UPAA), Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG), National Secretariat for Social Action-Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Bishop Broderick Pabillo and Bishop Deogracias Yniguez of the Commission on Public Affairs of the CBCP, Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG), Ecumenical Bishops Forum, National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Dr. Rachel Roxas, dean of the De La Salle University- College of Computer Studies (DLSU-CCS), Dr. Reena Estuar, chair of the Ateneo de Manila University- Department of Information Communications System, Dr. Jaime Caro, chair of the UP Department of Computer Science, CAUCUS-Philippine Computer Society, Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP), Computer Professionals Union, Solidarity Philippines, Philippine Computer Emergency Response Team (PhCERT), National Union of Students in the Philippines (NUSP), Engr. Rodolfo Lozada, Dilaab-Hearts Foundation, Senior Catholic Citizens Organization, Coordinating Council for People's Development and Governance (CPDG), Health Alliance for Democracy, (HEAD), TransparentElections.org, Concerned Citizens' Movement (CCM), Association of Schools of Public Administrators in the Philippines (ASPAP), Transparency International-Philippines, Pagbabago (Movement for Social Change), Council for Health and Development (CHD), Movement for Good Governance (MGG), Alyansa Agrikultura, and others.

What is AES Watch?

The AES Watch is an independent, voluntary, proactive, and nationwide networking of citizens groups and individual volunteers promoting clean elections and ensuring that the May 2010 elections push through – either automated or manual – with proper safeguards and remedies in place towards achieving a peaceful, transparent and credible exercise.

The AES Watch was initially formed in mid-October 2009 from a group of more than 200 signatories –individuals and organizations – to the Joint Appeal for the Release of the Source Code initiated by CenPEG , NASSA-CBCP, AMRSP, NCCP, Solidarity Philippines, CCM, Ecumenical Bishops Forum (EBF), and UPAA. With the Comelec remaining unresponsive to the appeal, the initial conveners vowed to continue engaging in activities aimed at increasing critical awareness of the AES among the public and media. They saw the need to counteract the negative suggestion that critical studies about the AES and the Comelec preparations are equivalent to promoting backward, manual election system or to siding with cheaters and being "doomsayers."

Moreover, the conveners agreed that being critical means being active partici-

pants in helping ensure the success of the AES and the May 2010 elections while engaging the Comelec to pursue proper preparations. Lastly, the conveners also agreed that it is important to engage the public – the key stakeholders – especially in raising their level of awareness and participation in the crucial forthcoming elections.

How was AES Watch formed?

The coming May 2010 national and local elections are crucial. A new President will be chosen, together with other national and local officials, with close to 50 million people expected to vote. For the first time, the synchronized elections will be automated using technology outsourced to a foreign-backed consortium. Time is running out but the Comelec has yet to make a convincing case that it is ready to implement a trustworthy automated election system (AES). Preparations for full automation are replete with uncertainties (e.g., timely delivery by supplier of voting machines, nationwide availability of electronic transmission facilities, etc.). The Comelec has already revised the AES implemen-

tation timetable six times to accommodate delays and constant changes in schedules.

Studies by advocacy groups have found the AES to suffer from technical vulnerabilities such as those related to verifiability of voting results, security of electronic transmission, etc. Safeguards against these vulnerabilities must be put in place to deter internal rigging, but the plans of Comelec in this regard remain unclear. The possibility of electronic fraud, if not satisfactorily addressed, is a serious concern as cheating machineries are getting honed while majority of the Filipino voters have yet to fully comprehend the workings of the AES and their implications on voters' rights.

Apprehensive about the contingencies faced by the AES, many concerned citizens and advocacy groups have taken separate initiatives to engage the Comelec. Individually, they have shared critical findings of studies on the AES, called and lobbied for safeguards and remedies, and/or offered alternative systems, with the common aim of getting the needed remedial or corrective measures instituted, but to no avail. Some have also asked the Comelec to be forthright in disclosing the true state of its preparedness for the AES. Already, reports from the ground show that most likely elections cannot be fully-automated and that manual voting will still take place in many parts of the country.

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Under the circumstances, there is a need to organize a more vigilant and broader coalition of citizens groups and individual volunteers critically looking at the AES preparations, so as to have stronger voice through unified action and public support, in engaging the Comelec. The Comelec must institute the necessary measures, including appropriate contingency plans, to ensure peaceful, clean, and credible elections come May 2010.

Who are the members of AES Watch?

The AES Watch, as formed, is multi-sectoral. It welcomes the participation of groups and individuals from key sectors who subscribe to clean and transparent elections and are keen to be involved in monitoring the preparations for and conduct of the AES. The AES Watch is open to the ecumenical community, human rights groups, lawyers, academics and youth-students, various professionals most especially IT practitioners, business, media, and other basic sectors working in the grassroots communities.

The AES Watch will liaise with poll-accredited groups like PPCRV, as well as with NAMFREL and other national and international observers' missions that will be deployed during the elections. Networking will extend to political parties and other cause-oriented organizations that promote transparent and credible elections.

What is its advocacy?

The AES Watch will engage the Comelec on issues related to the readiness and trustworthiness of the AES. It will

1. Urge Comelec to defining the parameters of its readiness for the automated elections, hybrid or partial automation, and/or manual elections in the country: How many will be fully automated? How many will go partial? How many will go manual?

2. Propose appropriate mechanisms and actions for, as well as participate in any way possible, in addressing problems and gaps in the AES preparations;

3. Help come up with clear guidelines as well as practical application of an appropriate adjudication process according to the design of the election system;

4. Ensure safeguards and remedial measures on the identified vulnerabilities and critical areas to raise the level of trustworthiness and credibility of the AES and/or ensure that elections push through in May 2010 whatever the problems are.

While respecting unified stand on common concerns under the AES Watch, individual members and groups may continue engaging respectively on their own as individual organizations or in tandem with other groups with the Comelec on pertinent issues.

More intensively, the AES Watch will pursue public advocacy with regard to the major issues of poll automation and management with the objective of raising public awareness on the criticalness of the automated election as well as participate in ensuring mechanisms and transparent, and credible elections. Various forms of advocacy will be used, including:

1. statements, letters, paid ads, petitions, press releases, position papers

2. participation in JCOC hearings, interventions, dialogues, and consultations with Comelec and concerned stakeholders

3. forums, symposia, roundtable discussions, conferences and the like

4. media and press dialogues, conference;

conference;

5. website for education and other exchange of information

6. preparation and dissemination of voters education and poll watchers guides in support of all other voters education and poll watch trainings

AES WATCH PRINCIPLES OF UNITY

The following principles will serve as the basis of unity and action of the AES Watch:

1. Election and the right to vote are a sovereign right. Election is a public, political, and democratic exercise that expresses the people's free, sovereign, and political will to choose the government that will represent their rights and aspirations as a nation and as a people. It is a means toward making democracy work and making public governance solely as a public service and for public interest with accountability.

2. Secret voting and public/transparent counting. Election and all its instruments – including poll automation - must guarantee the democratic principle of secret voting and public/transparent counting.

Guided by the right to public information, the people have the right to vote in secrecy as well as the right to know how votes are verified and counted and that results truly express their free and sovereign will.

3. Right to know. The right to vote is exercised not only on Election Day. The right to vote includes the right to know how an election system such as the AES works, including its source code, secret and public keys, and all other major features and vulnerabilities. It is the people's right to know critically whether poll automation will ensure clean, transparent, and credible elections so they will be able to safeguard their votes and make sure their vote counts.

"The right to vote is exercised not only on Election Day"

4. Clean and credible election. An election can be clean and credible only in the absence of all types of fraud, such as tampered voters' registration, vote buying, internal rigging and hacking, *dagdag-bawas* (vote padding- and -shaving), intimidation and militarization, and so on.

5. Accountability. Those responsible for negligence and mismanagement of the election, fraud, deliberate voters' disenfranchisement, partisan politics of government agencies, and all other attempts at manipulating the election must be held liable and accountable in accordance with current election laws.

The AES Watch Organizational Structure

The AES Watch currently has a Working Group composed of the original conveners who initiated the AES Watch formation last October. This Working Group, as expanded to accommodate new groups and individuals joining the AES Watch, will continue to perform the coordinating function.

The AES Watch will have as its highest consensus making body, the Assembly to be composed of all groups and individuals advocating transparent and credible AES and May 2010 polls.

The AES membership may be organized into sub-groups to facilitate coordination and action, e.g.:

1. IT

2. NGO/PO

3. Academe

4. Church/Faith

5. Research/Policy Study

6. Business

7. Lawyers/Legal

8. Media

From the Assembly, a Multi-Sectoral Coordinating Secretariat will be organized from its list of conveners to involve multi-sectoral leaders, representatives of different groups from different regions, volunteering their individual or organizational resources to promote critical AES watch advocacy and active intervention for transparent and credible May 2010 polls.

An Advisory Group may be organized composed of one or two representatives from each of the following sectors: business, IT, church, media, NGO, academe, research/study, lawyers, which can be consulted from time to time regarding the network's multifaceted concerns.

For further inquiries, please contact us at:

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