



## **FINAL PRESS STATEMENT**

**The People's International Observers' Mission (IOM)**

**Manila, Philippines, Friday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

Delegates of the People's International Observers' Mission (IOM), representing 12 countries from throughout the world, were dispatched from May 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> in order to observe, document and report on the mid-term national elections from the ground in 7 key voting regions throughout the Philippines.

Participants in the IOM traveled from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, South Korea, Japan, Myanmar, Norway, Scotland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.S. in response to an international appeal from numerous church leaders, professionals, academics and grassroots organizations in the Philippines working to observe the democratic process in the face of alleged electoral fraud, militarization and violence rampant during the 2004 national elections.

Contrary to an internationally publicized statement from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo that Filipino voters "cast their ballot, free of coercion and according to their own will," representatives of the IOM witnessed a strikingly different reality including: significant number of disenfranchisement of voters and vote buying, deadly election-related violence, direct intimidation of voters by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), suspicious absence and abandonment of duties and responsibilities of COMELEC officials at numerous voting locations and incidents of overt coercion by candidates from powerful political clans.

Detailed information on the election process collected by IOM representatives working throughout the country pointed to an intimate relationship between systemic violations of the electoral process in 2007, the ongoing socio-economic crisis in the Philippines rooted in neo-liberal economic policies and the terror of systemic extra-judicial killings which have claimed the lives of over 850 people since 2001.

Representatives of the IOM working in Tondo, Manila during the elections encountered an election observer from the U.S. Embassy in Manila who stated that "the Philippines is clearly a vibrant democracy," amidst the election chaos, fraud and violence on top of diminishing avenues for democratic participation.

The IOM has concluded that all political and electoral related killings in the Philippines place a shadow over the entire national electoral process and must be seriously investigated on a national and international level.

IOM representatives also collected multiple testimonies gathered from community representatives outlining systematic harassment of voters supporting legitimate political party-lists by the AFP in voting districts throughout the country. Concrete documentation of an

organized vilification campaign carried out both overtly and covertly by the AFP against legitimate party-lists was also gathered by the IOM.

Despite this reality, grassroots organizations throughout the electoral districts have made impressive organized popular efforts to safeguard their democratic rights.

Throughout the Philippines overt political coercion through electoral corruption, open 'vote buying', rampant breaches of electoral regulations and outright terror fashioned a context through which economic and political dynasties attempted to perpetuate their positions of power through the mid-term elections.

Multiple international IOM teams gathered comprehensive information on the Filipino electoral process, including extensive interviews with affected voters, hours of video testimony, hundreds of photographs from the following 10 areas; Tondo, Manila; Makati City; Quezon in Southern Tagalog; Sorsogon & Masbate in Bicol; Nueva Ecija & Pampanga in Central Luzon; Cebu in the Visayas; Islamic City of Marawi in Lanao del Sur & Compostela Valley in Mindanao.

IOM observers have compiled the collected data and are in the process of drafting a final report and a series of recommendations to be broadcast to the people of the Philippines, the ruling governmental Administration and the international community.

Among the initial recommendations concluded by the People's International Observers' Mission (IOM) are the following; institute major changes in the electoral processes and procedures in order to make them less cumbersome; insulate the elections from the partisanship of governmental agencies and public officials; alter the culture of fraud engendered by traditional politicians; effectively halt the military's interventionist role within the election process; reinforce the party-list system in order to guarantee genuine representation of marginalized sectors; elevate the consciousness and education of voters; conduct an independent and serious investigation on the conduct of the 2004 national elections in order to resolve the question of legitimacy of Arroyo's mandate.

The diverse array of 27 observers who participated in the People's IOM, including trade unionists, students, social activists, clergy, academics, artists, and lawyers from around the world accompanied by national and local leaders of church, grassroots, and non-governmental organizations have contributed an essential piece to the popular effort to support the realization of democracy in the Philippines.##