



Republika ng Pilipinas
Komisyon ng Karapatang Pantao
(Commission on Human Rights)

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVISORY
CHRP-2007-001

RIGHT TO SUFFRAGE-VOTERS EDUCATION

The right to suffrage is one prized right. Election day is one instance when in one day ALL becomes equal before the law – regardless of sex, religious, political and other beliefs, property, racial background, status, literacy and education. This is the time when everyone, and each one, participate in equal share and weight, that is, with one vote.

The right to suffrage is the spirit and essence of democracy and republicanism. In a country with a government “of the people, by the people and for the people,” election becomes so vital and momentous that it gives life to the government itself.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution is explicit,

“The Philippines is a republican state. *Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them.*”¹

Universally, the right to take part in government is proclaimed and guaranteed by the International Bill of Human Rights and other international conventions. Countries and peoples across the globe have recognized that free and fair elections are a crucial point on the continuum of democratization and an imperative means of giving voice to the will of the people, which is the basis of government authority itself.²

Hence, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights provides that,

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”³

In the same vein, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights states that,

“Every citizen shall have the right and opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

- (a) to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

¹ Article II, section 4

² Human Rights and Elections, Professional Training Series No. 2, page 1, United Nations, 1994

³ Article 21, paragraph 3, UDHR

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- (b) *to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;*⁴

The Commission on Human Rights, as a national human rights institution, is mindful of the significance and impact on Philippine life and culture of the forthcoming electoral exercise. As such, the Commission is inspired, pursuant to its mandate, to issue this advisory.

The Philippines has been both a witness and victim to the problematic, perverted and violent exercise of elections in the country. It is marred with irregularities, fraud, terrorism, vote-buying, ballot snatching, bribery and cheating. These are obstacles in reflecting the true will of the electorate. It affects the credibility of the whole democratic process and mocks at this sacred right to suffrage.

As an independent national institution, the Commission's hands are tied into entering into purely political affairs. Nevertheless, this is not a deterrent for the Commission to ensure that the right to suffrage will be respected and given full worth. In this regard, the Commission believes in the advantage, significance and necessity of a meaningful voters education. In this day and age, information as a tool is invaluable.

Implicit in the concept of free choice is that of an informed choice. As has been seen, if elections are to be genuine, they must reflect the political will of the people. Voters can neither formulate nor express that will without access to information about the candidates, the parties and the process. Well-organized, non-partisan voter information programmes and unhindered distribution of political propaganda are therefore critical elements of genuine elections.⁵

Voter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of article 25 rights of the ICCPR⁶ by an informed community.⁷ For without a well-informed electorate, it is impossible to guarantee that elections genuinely reflect the will of the people.⁸

Thus, the Commission, pursuant to its mandate to promote the primacy of human rights through education and information,⁹ calls on the following:

1. All CHRP Central and Regional Offices, Government Agencies and Institutions, the COMELEC, State Colleges and Universities, Civil Society Organizations, Private Organizations, and even informal organized groups advocating free and fair elections, in the conduct of electoral education, to adhere to the United Nations Standards on Human Rights and Elections, to wit:

- a. Non-partisan civic education should aim to inform voters as to the "who, what, when, where and how" of registration and voting. It should also help to inform the public on issues such as why they should participate, and what guarantees are in

⁴ Article 25, paragraphs (a) and (b), ICCPR

⁵ Human Rights and Elections, Professional Training Series No. 2, paragraph 87, page 13, United Nations, 1994

⁶ article 25 of the ICCPR cited above

⁷ General Comment No. 25, paragraph 11, ICCPR

⁸ Human Rights and Elections, Professional Training Series No. 2, paragraph 36, page 7, United Nations, 1994

⁹ Article XIII, Section 18, paragraph 5, 1987 Philippine Constitution and Executive Order No. 163

place to protect their right to participate confidently in the process.

- b. Voter information should be accessible to all members of society, regardless of their language or level of literacy. As such voter education materials should be multimedia and multilingual, and culturally appropriate for various social groups.
- c. Civic education activities should also include specially targeted training for certain professional groups, in order to prepare them for their respective roles in the electoral process. These may include such groups as registration and polling officials, police and security personnel, the media, political parties, etc.¹⁰

2. The Regional Offices of the CHRP to monitor compliance to this advisory by those identified in paragraph 1.

The Commission on Human Rights joins the whole Filipino nation to watch, guard, and ensure that the coming elections will be free, fair, honest, peaceful, orderly, genuine and credible.

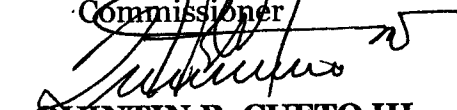
Done in Quezon City on the 3rd day of May 2007.


PURIFICACION C. VALERA QUISUMBING
Chairperson


ELIGIO P. MALLARI
Commissioner


WILHELM D. SORIANO
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Commissioner


QUINTIN B. CUETO III
Commissioner

¹⁰ Human Rights and Elections, Professional Training Series No. 2, paragraphs 88 to 90, page 13, United Nations, 1994 