

Detainees can vote in 2010 polls – Comelec

by ANNA VALMERO
Inquirer.net

MANILA – An official of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Tuesday said that for the first time in a long time, detainees will be able to exercise their right of suffrage in the upcoming 2010 elections.

Commissioner Rene Sarmiento, Comelec commissioner and head of the technical working group (TWG) for detainee voting, said detainees, or individuals who are in jail but have not been sentenced, are still presumed innocent and retain their right of suffrage.

In previous polls, detainees have failed to vote due to “legal and administrative” limitations, he said.

“In our en banc meeting on Tuesday, we have finalized the resolution for detainee registration and voting in the 2010 elections,” Sarmiento told INQUIRER.net.

He said the Comelec en banc amended some parts of the TWG proposal. Among them is that Comelec and not the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology would implement both the registration and voting of the detainees.

He said Comelec’s Election and Barangay Affairs Department would oversee the registration while the office of Comelec executive director Jose Tolentino would be the voting.

“In the past, there have been reservations from the part of Comelec to implement this initia-

tive but now that it is approved, I can say we have achieved a quantum leap for setting the captive votes free and allow them to be heard by our elected leaders,” he added.

There will be two modes of detainee registration: on-site satellite registration and off-site escorted registration at municipal or city Election Offices via express lane for detainees, said Sarmiento.

For on-site satellite registration, the detention facility must have at least 200 detainees who are qualified to register as voters. In this mode, detainees may also transfer their registration records.

In facilities which have fewer than 200 detainees who are qualified to register and vote, an off-site escorted voting is preferred. Under this mode, detainees need to obtain a court order to allow them to go to their town or city; they must be accompanied by BJMP personnel for security purposes, said Sarmiento.

Under the law, a municipality or city election officer (EO) is required “to register all residents of the municipality or city where he is posted.” If a detainee is transferred to another detention facility, the detainee’s registration information will also be transferred to the new detention facility.

On election day, detainees will be eligible to vote in the city or municipality where their registration facility is located, provided they are at least 18 years old and have stayed for at least 6 months in the area, said the proposal.

Presently, detainees are set to vote on election day as they are not covered by the existing early voting law for government personnel who perform election duties that day, Sarmiento said.

“We will urge Congress to pass the early voting bills to include detainees—Gordon has a bill in the Senate while three congressmen have bills at the House of Representatives. What the Comelec can do is to remind them to focus on this early voting laws—it is up to them now,” he said.

Sarmiento added that the Comelec TWG will hold meetings with BJMP to plan for the off-site registration and voting in coordination with the Commission on Human Rights and Department of Interior and Local Government.

According to February statistics of the Bureau of Jail and Management and Penology (BJMP), detainees comprise about 95 percent of the total 60,000 BJMP jail population, said Bryan Julius Gabriel, chief of policies and doctrine division under BJMP’s directorate for program development.

About 40, 000 to 45,000 BJMP detainees are qualified to register and vote in 2010, while 22,080 are not yet registered and 1,820 have been de-listed for not voting in at least two elections, the BKMP exec noted.

At least 13,126 detainees are registered but cannot vote because have been transferred to another detention facility, Gabriel added. ■

Honest OFW came from honest tribe in Vizcaya

by MOSES EBREO
AND MELVIN GASCON
Inquirer.net

BAMBANG, NUEVA VIZCAYA – The Filipino migrant worker, who returned HK\$350,545 or P2.1 million in cash and in checks she found in a garbage bin in Hong Kong to its owner, is a member of a local indigenous tribe known for its honesty.

Mildred Perez, 38, is now the toast of her provincemates for her display of honesty, a trait that has been ingrained in most members of the Isinai tribe.

“It is an honor to be honest,” said Andres Perez, 56, father of Mildred. He said honesty was an honored virtue in the tribe.

Although most of the tribal folk lack money, “poverty does not justify a person to steal,” he said.

“Money is temporary and it can vanish anytime but dignity is forever. This admirable virtue is passed on from one generation to another,” he said.

Jobless The Isinai people rejoiced over reports that government officials were pooling funds to raise P100,000 for Perez, who has been jobless since 2007 when she filed sexual assault charges against her Hong Kong employer.

Hong Kong law prohibits foreigners who have sued their employers from taking up employment until the case is resolved.

Members of the tribe, who

occupy the villages of Baag and Banggot, till the land and plant crops for a living. But the harvest is not enough to support their children’s education, thus driving some of them to seek jobs abroad.

One of them, Perez, went to Hong Kong to work as a maid so she could send her children—Jefferson, 17, and Norabel, 16—to college.

Her husband, Eddie Bunde, 37, was left to look after the children. He farms and drives a tricycle.

Husband honest, too

Less than a month before his wife returned the money, Bunde drove Elsa Tugade, administrative officer of Nueva Vizcaya State University (NVSU), who withdrew P20,000 from a bank to purchase the school’s foundation gifts on March 19.

Tugade was shocked, however, when she found that the envelope containing the money and her identification card were missing. Bunde, a migrant from Ligao City in Albay, said he noticed the money as it was scattered, after he failed to slow down over a hump. Immediately, he looked for Tugade at NVSU and returned the amount.

“I was going crazy over the lost money. But (Bunde) is honest. I really admire his character,” Tugade said.

“We rarely see this value nowadays because of poverty.”

Proud

Bunde said he was proud of his wife for maintaining her dignity and not succumbing to temptation despite their hardships.

“I am happy that she is honest, too. Though she cannot send enough money to us, we assure her that we can get by,” he said.

On Tuesday, Bunde, along with his relatives in Barangay Aliaga, was celebrating the birthday of his mother-in-law Melda when the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* paid a visit.

The celebration became more meaningful when they learned about Perez’s honesty and the generosity of people who wanted

to donate money to her and her family.

Assistance, resolution Nueva Vizcaya Gov. Luisa Cuaresma and the provincial board approved on Wednesday the granting of a P50,000 initial assistance to the family of Perez.

In a resolution, the board commended Perez “for her display of exemplary honesty” in returning the money and checks.

“This laudable act of (Perez) is a trait of a true (Novo) Vizcayano that has made us all proud of and worthy of emulation,” it said.

A native of Barangay Aliaga, 19 kilometers from the town proper, Perez used to work as a maid in Hong Kong until she filed sexual assault charges against her employer.

Collecting recyclables

Out of job, Perez has since been supporting her stay in Hong Kong by collecting and selling recyclables, such as soda cans.

In one of her rounds through trash cans on April 29, she found a bag containing cash and checks worth HK\$350,545. Perez traced the owners of the money and returned it. Out of gratitude, they gave her a can of cookies.

“What (Perez) has found could have already ended her misfortunes, but then the good values and the inherent honesty instilled (in her) at a young age by her honest and strict father reigned in her heart,” the board resolution said.

“That is how Novo Vizcayanos, particularly Bambanguenos, are,” Cuaresma said.

Nueva Vizcaya Rep. Carlos Padilla also filed a resolution commending Perez.

“By returning the money, Perez has demonstrated that the traits of honesty and trustworthiness are not lost among the Filipinos even abroad,” Padilla said in the resolution.

“Moreover, she has set an example worthy of emulation which deserves the full appreciation and deep gratitude of the Filipino nation.” ■

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