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NGOs fight vote-buying

Movement launched to change RP politics

by PHILIP TUBEZA
 Inquirer.net

WITH 12 months to go before the next elections, veteran community organizers and development workers across the country launched a nationwide movement on Sunday, May 10, to get rid of vote-buying.

The ChangePolitics Movement, which includes former Social Welfare Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman, will map out the "vote-buying vulnerable areas" so that NGOs could pour their resources there and eliminate the scourge of Philippine politics.

The movement plans to turn these places into "vote-buying free areas" come election day as a beginning of its long-term vision to end "patronage and transactional politics" in the country by 2022.

"Our members are already going around the country so that we could map out the vulnerable vote-buying areas," Soliman said at the group's launching at Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City.

"And then we will invite and encourage development NGOs, micro-enterprise programs, cooperatives and livelihood programs to start helping these



First-time voters hang a big streamer at the Bonifacio Shrine in Manila to remind everyone about the urgency of registering, with only 175 days to go before the registration deadline and 365 days left before the 2010 national elections. Photo by Rem Zamora

areas to decrease vote-buying because (people) will now have an answer to poverty," she added.

Soliman said her group was capable of implementing its plan because its core group of 2,000 members had "on average" 15 years experience in community development work and organizing.

"Why do we say this is doable? Because the individual members of ChangePolitics are former and current community organizers who have different ongoing development programs," she said.

"In other words, this is a movement to link the development work that we do into getting and changing politics, one of which is by reducing the vulnerability to vote-buying," she added.

Not products for sale
 "They tell candidates that if they have money they should give these to community projects rather than through individual gifts because, (as one ChangePolitics member) said, we are not products (for sale)," Soliman added.

Vote-buying has been rampant in the Philippines with politicians paying P500 to P1,500 to each voter.

An April, 2007, survey by Social Weather Stations found that one in two registered voters thought that it was not wrong to accept money from candidates so long as one voted "according to one's conscience."

Asked for their opinion on the statement "In an election, it is not bad to accept money provided one votes according to one's conscience," 50 percent of the respondents agreed, 32 percent disagreed, while 16 percent were undecided.

Those in the rural areas (56 percent) were found to be more likely to approve of accepting money, compared to those in urban areas (43 percent), according to the survey held before the May 2007 elections. ■

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