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COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Banks and Financial Intermediaries	HB 10440	Rep. Cua	Reorganizing the Land Bank of the Philippines	<p>The Committee, chaired by Quirino Rep. Junie Cua, will deliberate further on House Bill 10440 in its next meeting on November 16.</p> <p>Rep. Cua, who is also the author of HB 10440, said that it is high time for the passage of a law providing a “stand-alone” charter of the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) to give it enough flexibility it as it continues to play its important role in nation building, particularly in the emancipation of farmers from poverty.</p> <p>The LBP is a government financial institution which was created in 1963 by virtue of Republic Act 3844, or the Agricultural Land Reform Code, to finance primarily the acquisition and distribution of agricultural estates for division and resale to small landholders. As stated in the explanatory note attached to HB 10440, since its creation, various laws have been passed broadening the bank’s powers and functions. Over the years, the LBP grew from being the financing arm of the government’s agrarian reform program to becoming the second-largest full service-commercial bank in the country in terms of assets.</p> <p>LBP President and Chief Executive Officer Cecilia Borromeo expressed support for the bill, saying that it will enable the LBP to implement more effectively the policies of the national government on countryside development while sustaining its institutional viability.</p> <p>LBP Banking Legal Services head Cesar Cabañes explained that at present, the LBP’s charter is just part of the Agricultural Land Reform Code. Hence, the bill creates a stand-alone charter for LBP which shall focus on agricultural development.</p> <p>Cabañes said that one of the amendments to the LBP charter, as proposed in the bill, is the removal of presidential approval in offering and issuing common and preferred shares of stocks. Instead, it shall be the Secretary of Finance who shall approve the manner and quantity related to the offering and issuance of shares of stocks, upon the recommendation of the LBP’s Board of Directors. However, the national government shall maintain, at all times, at least two-thirds ownership of the total outstanding common voting shares of the LBP. On capitalization, Cabañes said that the bill</p>

<p>Continuation... Banks and Financial Intermediaries</p>				<p>provides that the capital stock of the LBP shall be P200 billion divided into two billion common shares with a par value of P100 per share.</p> <p>The bill also institutionalizes LBP's corporate social responsibility (CSR) program; as well as includes provisions that introduce changes in the membership of the Board of Directors and its powers and responsibilities, foreclosure of collaterals and disposal of bank acquired assets, and compensation of LBP's executive officers, among others.</p> <p>Cabañes added that HB 10440 authorizes the LBP to reorganize or rationalize its organizational structure. All those who shall retire or are separated from the service on account of LBP's reorganization shall be entitled to gratuities and benefits provided under existing laws and the supplementary retirement plan of the LBP.</p> <p>Rep. Jose "Jun" Ong Jr. (2nd District, Northern Samar) asked if the remaining one-third or 33% common voting shares of the LBP may be owned by private individuals once the proposed law is passed.</p> <p>Cabañes answered in the affirmative. He explained that under the existing charter of the LBP, the capital stock of the LBP may only be owned by the national government.</p> <p>Department of Finance (DOF) Legal Affairs Office Director Joyce Briones suggested that only 20% of the LBP's outstanding capital stock shall be subject to initial public offering (IPO) or be listed in the Philippine Stock Exchange.</p> <p>When asked by Rep. Cua why the DOF only limits the IPO to 20%, Briones said that it is to ensure that control of the LBP will still remain with the government, while giving the public opportunity to own some of the bank's stocks.</p> <p>Borromeo said that the suggestion of DOF is well within the proposed one-third of the common voting shares of the LBP that may be offered to the public.</p> <p>Rep. Cua asked how the LBP intends to sell the remaining 13% of the one-third share if only 20% will be subjected to IPO as suggested by the DOF.</p> <p>Borromeo explained that based on the proposed law, it is the DOF that will determine how many shares of stocks will be offered to the public and the manner by which the same will be offered.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Borromeo requested the Committee to amend Section 20 (Reorganization of the Bank) of HB 10440 to allow employees, who opt to retire before the optional retirement age of 60, to avail of the</p>
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<p>Continuation... Banks and Financial Intermediaries</p>				<p>incentives for early separation. She said that the LBP wants to incentivize those who will retire early and are not yet qualified to receive pension from the Government Service Insurance System.</p> <p>Section 20 provides that the LBP may incentivize early separation of tenured employees and those with medical conditions who will be considered for retirement before the compulsory retirement age of 65 years old.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Virgilio Lacson (Party-List, MANILA TEACHERS), LBP Human Resources Management Group head Joselito Vallada said that the intention of providing separation incentives based on medical grounds is to encourage the early retirement of those who have debilitating condition which will affect their productivity.</p> <p>Rep. Lacson suggested that the term “medical condition” used in Section 20 should be defined. Vallada agreed with the suggestion of Rep. Lacson.</p> <p>The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the Civil Service Commission committed to submit their respective position papers on the bill by November 12.</p>
<p>Foreign Affairs</p>	<p>HCR 22</p>	<p>Rep. Hofer</p>	<p>Granting consent to the Honorable Delfin N. Lorenzana, Secretary of the Department of National Defense, to receive the peace medal awarded by the President of the Republic of Indonesia</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Ann Hofer (2nd District, Zamboanga Sibugay), adopted House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 22 subject to style and amendment. The corresponding Committee Report was likewise approved.</p> <p>Batanes Rep. Ciriaco Gato Jr. presided over the deliberations on HCR 22 to allow the Chair to sponsor her measure.</p> <p>Rep. Hofer said that HCR 22 seeks to grant consent to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana to receive the Peace Medal to be awarded by the President of the Republic of Indonesia “in recognition for his zealous efforts to foster Philippine-Indonesia relations.” Rep. Hofer said that Lorenzana will be the first Filipino to receive the Peace Medal award from Indonesia. However, according to the Constitution “No elective or appointive public officer or employee shall receive additional, double, or indirect compensation, unless specifically authorized by law, nor accept without the consent of the Congress, any present, emolument, office, or title of any kind from any foreign government.” Hence, Rep. Hofer filed the measure to authorize Lorenzana to receive such prestigious award.</p> <p>Based on HCR 22, Republic of Indonesia President Joko Widodo conferred the Peace Medal to Lorenzana in recognition of his role in the rescue of Indonesian fishermen abducted by the Abu Sayyaf Group in September 2019 off Malaysian waters near the southern end of</p>

Continuation... Foreign Affairs				Mindanao in December 2019 by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Assistant Secretary for Asia Pacific Affairs Nathaniel Imperial expressed support for HCR 22.
	HR 1962	Deputy Speaker Rodriguez	Expressing the sincerest appreciation and profound gratitude of the House of Representatives to Japan's Consul General in Davao, Yoshiaki Miwa, for his continuing commitment and support in strengthening the Philippines-Japan relations in Mindanao	The Committee adopted HR 1962 subject to style and amendment. The corresponding Committee Report was likewise approved. The DFA supports Congress' move to honor Japan's Consul General in Davao Yoshiaki Miwa for his continuing commitment and support in strengthening the Philippines-Japan relations. DFA Assistant Secretary Imperial said Japan is the first country the Philippines has built a bilateral strategic partnership with and this year commemorates the 10 th year of the countries' strategic partnership and 65 th year of Philippines-Japan diplomatic relations. Imperial added that Japan continues to provide support to Mindanao especially in the reconstruction of the war-stricken Marawi City, the realization of the Bangsamoro transition, as well as responding to the pandemic through the provision of COVID-19 vaccines and financial assistance.
	HB 8767	Rep. Chatto	Establishing a regular Department of Foreign Affairs' (DFA) Consular Office in the City of Tagbilaran, Province of Bohol and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee agreed to substitute House Bill 8767 with a House Resolution and subsequently adopted the latter, subject to style. The corresponding Committee Report was likewise approved. The title of the Substitute Resolution shall be "Urging the DFA to create a consular office in Tagbilaran City, Bohol." Rep. Hofer said that the Committee has previously approved resolutions, instead of bills, pertaining to the creation of consular offices in certain areas in the country. Thus, the Committee agreed to substitute HB 8767 with a resolution, upon the suggestion of Rep. Hofer. DFA Office of Consular Affairs Assistant Secretary Senen Mangalile expressed support for the measure. However, he informed the Committee that the budget for the proposed establishment of the consular office in Tagbilaran was not included in the DFA's proposed budget for 2022. Nevertheless, he said that it could be considered in the 2023 budget of the Department.
	HR 1395	Rep. Nieto	Directing the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, through the diplomatic efforts of the DFA, to take further steps to recover from the Government of the United States of America and preserve the "Doctrina Cristiana 1593"	The Committee will deliberate further on HR 1395. Rep. John Marvin "Yul Servo" Nieto (3 rd District, Manila) author of HR 1395, said that "Doctrina Cristiana 1593" is the first and the earliest book with Baybayin – the ancient Filipino script – printed in the Philippines during the Spanish colonization. It is essentially a catechism and a collection of prayers, and was supposed to be used in the

Continuation... Foreign Affairs				<p>propagation of Catholicism in the Philippines. It was considered as one of the major evidences that Filipinos have their own writing system before the Spaniards came. However, a copy of the Doctrina Cristiana is being housed and preserved in the United States Library of Congress. Hence, Rep. Nieto said that his resolution seeks to take further step to recover from the government of USA the Doctrina Cristiana 1593 which is an important historical artifact.</p> <p>DFA Office of American Affairs Executive Director Romulo Victor Israel Jr. said the DFA recognizes the significance of Doctrina Cristiana 1593. He affirmed that the only copy printed by the Dominican missionaries in 1593 carries cultural linguistic values and prayers in Tagalog and Baybayin script.</p> <p>He recommended that a careful study and a multi-stakeholder consultation be undertaken with the culture and the arts sector to discuss the intent and effect of the resolution.</p> <p>Likewise, National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) Chair Rene Escalante expressed reservation on the repatriation of the Doctrina Cristiana 1593 because the National Archives does not have a permanent building to ensure proper safekeeping of the artifact at this time.</p>
	HR 1416	Rep. Nieto	Directing the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, through the diplomatic efforts of the DFA, to take further steps to recover and preserve the “Katipunan Documents” from the Archivo Militar General de Madrid, under the Government of Spain	<p>The Committee will deliberate further on HR 1416.</p> <p>Rep. Nieto said that the “Katipunan Documents” bears a deep historical significance to the nation as it contains hundreds of handwritten letters of Andres Bonifacio, Emilio Jacinto, Pio Valenzuela, and other officials of the Katipunan. He said the documents were confiscated during the Spanish colonization and were never returned despite the Philippine liberation. The original set of documents is presently being housed and preserved in Archivo General Militar de Madrid, under the government of Spain.</p> <p>The government of Spain turned over a digitized version of the original Katipunan documents to the NHCP in 2012. However, Rep. Nieto believes that the ownership of such important historical artifacts should be with its country of origin.</p> <p>DFA Office of European Affairs Assistance Secretary Jaime Victor Ledda said that the DFA has engaged various agencies to discuss the recovery of the said artifacts and to determine the capacity of the country to preserve the same.</p> <p>Escalante reiterated the need to have a building for the proper safekeeping of the documents.</p>

<p>Housing and Urban Development</p>	<p>HR 1778</p>	<p>Rep. Biazon</p>	<p>Inquiry into the Bureau of Correction's (BuCor) overall plan with regard to its project to clear all structures within a 50-meter radius from the fence of the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) Compound in Muntinlupa City with particular concern to the dislocation of residents therein</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Francisco "Kiko" Benitez (3rd District, Negros Occidental), deferred consideration of House Resolution 1778 pending the submission of the position papers of the concerned agencies.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Benitez said that in today's meeting, the Committee aims to determine whether or not proper processes were observed in the relocation of informal settlers affected by the BuCor's project of clearing all structures within the 50-meter radius from the fence of the NBP in Muntinlupa City. The relocation started in May 2021.</p> <p>Muntinlupa City Rep. Ruffy Biazon, author of HR 1778, said that there was no proper coordination with the City Government of Muntinlupa in the demolition and eviction of the affected informal settler families (ISFs) by the BuCor. He underscored that pursuant to Executive Order 708, series of 2008, the local government unit (LGU) having territorial jurisdiction over the affected area is the sole clearing house for the conduct of demolition and eviction activities involving homeless and underprivileged citizens. Moreover, Rep. Biazon pointed out that such demolition is untimely given the difficulties already being experienced by the ISFs because of the pandemic.</p> <p>BuCor Deputy Director General Gabriel Chaclag explained that BuCor Director General Gerald Bantag ordered the clearing of the premises of the NBP prison facilities for security purposes. He reported that there were structures owned by ISFs and some active BuCor personnel within the 50-meter radius from the fence of the NBP compound which posed security concerns, the reason why these families were given a notice to vacate the area. He added that the affected ISFs voluntarily vacated their structures while the BuCor personnel were given time to look for a new home.</p> <p>Nevertheless, Chaclag gave the assurance that, with proper coordination with the concerned agencies, the BuCor would be able to allot a parcel of land for the relocation of the affected ISFs.</p> <p>Muntinlupa Councilor Raul Corro reported that the City Council passed a resolution last May 17, urging the BuCor to immediately cease and desist the eviction of ISFs and demolition of their houses within the NBP Reservation. The BuCor was required to first secure a compliance certificate from the city's Local Housing Board in accordance with existing laws and issuances. However, BuCor proceeded with the eviction and demolition operations despite the resolution, Corro stressed.</p> <p>Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) Public Housing and</p>
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<p>Continuation... Housing and Urban Development</p>				<p>Settlements Division-NCR Officer-in-Charge Mary Ann Policarpio reported that the DHSUD recommended the following to the BuCor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The demolition and eviction of the affected ISFs must be in accordance with Republic Act No. 7279 or the “Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992.” • A temporary relocation site must be provided for the affected ISFs and, if no permanent relocation is determined within a year, the temporary relocation will be converted into a socialized housing area for the affected ISFs. The BuCor should allocate a budget for the relocation and resettlement of the affected ISFs. • The BuCor must initiate the creation of a project inter-agency committee tasked to provide the overall direction for the relocation and resettlement of the affected ISFs. It should also coordinate with the National Housing Authority (NHA) to determine how much funds would be needed for the relocation of the affected ISFs, the possible housing program for its employees, and the technical assistance it would need both from the NHA and the DHSUD. <p>Rep. Benitez inquired if BuCor has already formed an inter-agency task force as recommended by DHSUD.</p> <p>BuCor Business Center head Randy Serrano replied that BuCor is still in the process of creating this task force and is presently coordinating with the key shelter agencies. The Committee asked BuCor to give an update on the status of the creation of the task force.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Rep. Biazon mentioned that he received reports that the BuCor used armed personnel and prisoners to harass and pressure the residents into immediately transferring to the relocation site.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) if such reports were true, <i>Kalipunan ng mga Mamamayan na Pinagkaisa sa NBP Inc.</i> President Bella de Guzman-Diaz affirmed the reports. De Guzman-Diaz added that she and other residents were even detained by BuCor personnel for questioning. De Guzman-Diaz also informed the Committee that there are still 3,000 families living within the 50-meter radius from the fence of the NBP; and only 1,600 families have relocated to Biazon Road. She lamented the absence of electricity and water source in the relocation site, thus appealing to the Committee to facilitate the provision or improvement of facilities in the area.</p>
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Continuation... Housing and Urban Development				<p>Chaclag clarified that BuCor only invited Diaz for proper identification because the latter and several other residents were in the area when BuCor demolished newly built structures within the 50-meter radius of the NBP.</p> <p>Likewise, Serrano claimed that there was no forced eviction and human rights violations in connection with the BuCor's clearing operations.</p> <p>Department of the Interior and Local Government lawyer Ralph Jerome Ifurung manifested his support for the Resolution. He echoed the statement of Rep. Biazon that the LGUs are the clearing house for the conduct of demolition and eviction activities involving informal settlers.</p> <p>Department of Justice (DOJ) Sate Counsel Normina Hadjula-Tadifa said that the DOJ will submit its position paper on HR 1778 in two weeks' time.</p>
	HB 10084	Rep. Noel	Strengthening the National Housing Authority (NHA), extending its corporate term, and amending for this purpose Presidential Decree 757 or the law creating the NHA	The Committee agreed to refer House Bill 10084 to the technical working group earlier created to deliberate on various bills seeking the extension of the corporate life of the NHA.
National Defense and Security	Substitute Bill to HBs 554, 941, 4048, 4050, 7677, 7939, 8056 & 8114	Reps. Biazon, CaboChan, Pimentel, Vargas, and Tupas	Strengthening professionalism and continuity of policies and modernization initiatives of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, providing funds therefor	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Raul "Boboy" Tupas (5th District, Iloilo), approved the substitute bill to the eight bills subject to style and amendment. The corresponding Committee Report was likewise approved.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Tupas informed the body that a technical working group was created to harmonize the various provisions of the bills. As a result, a substitute bill was crafted, which is now being presented to the Committee for consideration.</p> <p>Rep. Manuel CaboChan III (Party-List, MAGDALO), author of HB 941, underscored the importance of the proposed law in ensuring stability and continuity in the implementation of the modernization plans and programs of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). It also strengthens professionalism in the military and provides fixed terms for the Chief of Staff and other key positions in the AFP, Rep. CaboChan added.</p> <p>Among the agreements reached during the meeting were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The compulsory retirement of the AFP personnel shall cover those in the grade of Second Lieutenant/Ensign (O1) to Colonel or Captain (O6) upon reaching the age of 56 or the accumulation of 30 years of satisfactory active duty, whichever comes later. • The Philippine Military Academy Superintendent shall not be eligible for any other position in the AFP

Continuation... National Defense and Security				<p>except that of the Chief of Staff, as appointed by the higher authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed law shall take effect on July 1, 2022 after its publication either in the Official Gazette or any newspaper of general circulation. The effectivity of the proposed law shall coincide with the assumption to office of the new Commander in Chief and President of the Republic of the Philippines.
	HR 1423	Rep. Babasa	Commending the troopers of the 44 th Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army (PA), for their valuable achievements in counter-insurgency, anti-violent extremism, and successful dismantling of guerrilla fronts of communist terrorist groups in Western Mindanao	<p>The Committee adopted the six resolutions. The corresponding Committee Reports were likewise approved.</p> <p>Rep. Leonardo Babasa Jr. (2nd District, Zamboanga del Sur), author of the six resolutions, said that all these measures seek to recognize the notable accomplishments of the Philippine Army (PA) divisions and special units by honoring and commending the troopers for their valuable contribution in protecting and securing the Western Mindanao and its people from insurgencies.</p>
	HR 1424	Rep. Babasa	Commending the troopers of the 54 th Engineer Brigade, PA, for their valuable achievements and contributions to the promotion and maintenance of peace and internal stability in Western Mindanao	
	HR 1425	Rep. Babasa	Commending the troopers of the 102 nd Infantry Brigade, PA, for their valuable achievements in counter-insurgency, anti-violent extremism, and successful dismantling of guerrilla fronts of communist terrorist groups and to the promotion and maintenance of peace and internal stability in Western Mindanao	Rep. Babasa said that among the other contributions of the PA divisions and special units were the dismantling of guerilla fronts of communist terrorist groups as well as the support in the construction of much-needed infrastructure in the region. Rep. Babasa also recognizes the army's support in the construction of isolation and quarantine facilities in certain barangays in Zamboanga City and in the rehabilitation of <i>Bahay Pag-asa</i> for the affected families from war-torn Marawi City.
	HR 1426	Rep. Babasa	Commending the troopers of the 547 th Engineer Battalion, PA, for their valuable achievements and contributions to the promotion and maintenance of peace and internal stability in Western Mindanao	According to Rep. Tupas, the commendations will inspire the military personnel to continue serving with utmost dedication for the promotion and maintenance of peace in the country.
	HR 1434	Rep. Babasa	Commending the troopers of the 1 st Infantry Division, PA, under the leadership of Maj. Gen. Generoso M. Ponio, PA, for their valuable achievements in counter-insurgency, anti-violent extremism, and successful dismantling of guerrilla fronts of communist terrorist groups in Western and Northern Mindanao	
	HR 1452	Rep. Babasa	Commending the troopers of the 53 rd Infantry Battalion, PA, under the leadership of LTC Jo-Ar A. Herrera INF (GSC) PA, for their valuable achievements in counter-insurgency, anti-violent extremism, and successful dismantling of guerrilla fronts of communist terrorist groups in Western Mindanao	
	HB 555	Rep. Biazon	Authorizing the disposal and/or commercial development of certain military camps and reservations, creating for the purpose the Military Real Estate Development Authority, appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to further discuss House Bill 555.</p> <p>Muntinlupa City Rep. Ruffy Biazon, author of HB 555, underscored the need to maximize the utilization of real estate properties owned by the AFP to support its modernization</p>

Continuation... National Defense and Security				<p>program. He informed the body that because of the pandemic, the AFP's modernization program received a minimal budget as the government gave priority to the funding of activities for its COVID-19 response.</p> <p>The bill seeks to authorize the President of the Philippines to identify military real estate or parts thereof that could be disposed of and/or commercially developed to raise funds for the AFP's modernization program. To undertake the disposal and manage the development of military assets, the bill proposes the creation of a Military Real Estate Development Authority (MREDA).</p> <p>Rep. Biazon said that the MREDA will function as an agency similar to the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA).</p> <p>The representatives from the AFP and the Department of National Defense (DND) opposed the proposal to transfer the assets of the AFP to the MREDA.</p> <p>According to DND Office of Real Estate and Installations Director Nelson Lasquite, the AFP previously lost some of its properties and the control of the same when they were transferred to the management of the BCDA. He suggested that the Committee consider the possibility of allowing the AFP to manage its assets and dispose of its properties as necessary. Likewise, Lasquite suggested that the seven members of the MREDA Board should come from the DND instead of from the private sector.</p> <p>Under the proposed law, the MREDA's Board of Directors shall be composed of nine members with the Secretary of the DND as the ex officio Chair of the Board; the MREDA president as the Vice Chair; and seven members coming from the private sector.</p> <p>Rep. Godofredo Guya (Party-List, RECOBODA) expressed support for the proposed law as he recognized the need to look for other means to fund the modernization of the AFP given the limited budget allocated for the purpose by the government.</p> <p>The resource persons were requested to submit to the Committee their respective position papers on the bill.</p>
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AGENCY BRIEFING		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Suffrage and Electoral Reforms	Update by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) on its preparations for the May 9, 2022 national and local elections	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Juliet Marie de Leon Ferrer (4 th District, Negros Occidental), listened to the presentations of the COMELEC and civil society organizations (CSO) on the result of the

Continuation...
Suffrage and Electoral
Reforms

COMELEC Voting Simulation Exercise held on October 23 at the San Juan Elementary School in San Juan City.

In her opening statement, Rep. Ferrer manifested that it is the duty of the Committee Members to ensure that the upcoming May 9, 2022 national and local elections will be a success by protecting not only the people's right to vote but also their health and safety amid the COVID-19 health crisis.

COMELEC's Deputy Executive Director for Operations Teopisto Elnas Jr. apprised the Committee that the COMELEC *en banc* has just finished its report on the conduct of the voting simulation exercise. He said that a copy of the report will be forwarded to the Committee and the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on the Automated Election System after the report's final approval by COMELEC.

Based on the report, Elnas said the COMELEC *en banc* recommends the following:

- For the COMELEC's Law Department to study the feasibility of using a modified system of verification of voters and issuance of ballots to streamline the process during the May 9, 2022 national and local elections;
- For its Finance Department to study the cost implication of having a two-room system (a holding room and a voting room) in the polling places and whether funds for this are available;
- For its Administrative Services Department to survey whether there are sufficient rooms in all voting centers in case the two-room system will be implemented;
- To institutionalize the voter's assistance desk (VAD);
- To augment the volunteers from the CSO who will man the VAD and when budget allows, to include provisions for the training of personnel and volunteers who will be stationed in VAD and in emergency accessible polling places (EAPP), which cater to persons with disabilities (PWD), senior citizens, and pregnant women; and
- To release a voter's information sheet (VIS) to help voters locate their exact polling places and precincts.

National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) Project Management and Operations Specialist Paolo Maligaya presented his group's own observations and recommendations regarding the voting simulation exercise.

On the safety protocols, Maligaya noted that while temperature checking was done and sanitizing alcohol was readily available at the entrance to the polling place, the filling out and submission of health declaration and contact tracing forms was not required. Some voters were also not observing the minimum health protocols such as physical distancing, he further said.

With regard to those voting at the EAPP, Maligaya noted that possible violation of ballot secrecy may happen due to the fact that a runner is assigned to facilitate the voting of PWDs, senior citizens and pregnant women. He explained that during the elections, the runner will retrieve the ballot from the voter's assigned precinct and have it accomplished by the voter at the EAPP. The runner will then return the accomplished ballot to the precinct. This, according to Maligaya, may also lengthen the time spent by the voter inside the EAPP which can cause overcrowding on election day. Maligaya said that during the simulation, a senior citizen stayed as much as 44 minutes inside the EAPP.

Aside from possible overcrowding and violation of ballot secrecy, Maligaya said that the present voting processes may give voters an opportunity to take photos of their ballots, which is not allowed under existing election laws.

<p>Continuation... Suffrage and Electoral Reforms</p>		<p>According to Maligaya, NAMFREL's recommendations include the following: for COMELEC to find ways to shorten voter's time spent inside the EAPP; limit the number of voters in the verification and holding areas and inside the polling places; install bigger signage in the polling places; and establish information booths manned by identifiable poll workers who will serve as information officers and health protocol marshals.</p> <p>In their separate presentations, representatives from the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) echoed NAMFREL's observations.</p> <p>LENTE's Consultant for Policy and Legislation Helen Graido pointed out that the primary purpose of the simulation was to facilitate a time and motion study which was, however, not achieved due to low voter turnout. She, thus, recommended that more voting simulation exercises be done before the drafting of COMELEC's general instructions for the upcoming national and local elections.</p> <p>On the part of the PPCRV, Atty. Ronaldo Gutierrez asked the COMELEC to ensure that its online Precinct Finder is available weeks before the election day for faster location of the voter's polling place and minimize huddling at the polling places. Contrary to NAMFREL's recommendation, Gutierrez posited that the filling out of the health declaration form in the polling precincts may be superfluous and will unnecessarily create bottlenecks and overcrowding.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) said that based on his own calculation, it may take about 200 hours to accommodate the allotted 800 voters per clustered precinct. He then asked the COMELEC to explain how it will ensure that such number of voters will be able to vote given the limited span of time.</p> <p>COMELEC Commissioner Marlon Casquejo assured the body that such number of voters, in all probability, may be accommodated within the period from 6:00 a.m. until about 7:00 p.m. on election day for as long as there will be no considerable amount of "downtime" which, as in the past elections, happens usually during noontime. Casquejo likewise said that the voting period may be extended to allow people who are already within the 30-meter radius of the polling places to vote.</p> <p>Rep. Zarate recommended that the voting be extended until the following day to avoid possible disenfranchisement of voters which is likely to happen because of the peculiarity of the present situation.</p> <p>Casquejo explained that extending the election period for another day will entail additional funding as it will require another set of Board of Election Inspectors (BEIs). He noted, however, that as observed during the COMELEC voting simulation exercise, the least time recorded for a voter to complete the voting process was just six minutes. With five voters voting simultaneously in one precinct at a given time, taking about 10 minutes per set, it is possible that the 800 voters in each clustered precinct will be accommodated, Casquejo further said.</p> <p>The COMELEC is scheduled to present data and other requested information in relation to absentee voting and other concerns raised by the Center for Migrant Advocacy in the Committee's next meeting.</p>
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