

PRESS RELEASE

Valisno thanks teachers, partners

Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Mona Valisno expresses her thanks to the public school teachers, other agencies and entities who rendered their utmost cooperation to make the first automated election in the country a success.

“I consider our public school teachers my heroes. Thank you for a job well done,” said Valisno. “Our teachers delivered and they delivered well, living up to the expectation of the public we are sworn to serve. Their professionalism, dedication, patience, and sacrifice helped in achieving the success of the automated polls.”

She adds, “They went in early and stayed on even through the next day so we can cast our votes. They faced long lines, heightened tensions, even threats from supporters of candidates and they dealt with it professionally,” describing the situation in the polling precincts.

Valisno continues to monitor the election results and the condition of teachers in many areas of the country.

Thanks and praises

School teachers who served in the recently concluded elections received public approval for the orderly conduct of the historic first automated elections occasionally marred by malfunctioning counting machines, overcrowded polling precincts and reports of harassment.

“The commendations our teachers receive from various organizations and individuals are heart warming. I am sure our teachers are happy that their services are publicly appreciated,” Valisno said citing several offer of thanks and praises from civil society groups and individuals featured in the news since voting closed late Monday.

Praises and words of thanks also flooded cyberspace as bloggers and netizens gave their appreciation to public school teachers for their work in the recent polls. The airwaves are also filled with commendations to teachers from broadcasters and journalists.

Manila Archbishop Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, Former Commission on Elections (COMELEC) Commissioner Christian Monsod and Presidential Spokesperson Ricardo Saludo are some of those who gave praises to the teachers.

“(The teachers) kept their patience,” said the Archbishop.

Monsod said that foremost the teachers are the ones to be commended for any success in terms of speedy release of results this year’s election. “This was delivered by teachers and the COMELEC,” said Monsod in the GMA 7 2010 election coverage.

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"We thank the Lord above and commend the COMELEC, the hundreds of thousands of teachers and other civil servants who worked on the polls," Saludo said in a statement.

Valisno added that the teachers' dedication to duty and professionalism even in the face of difficulties is highly commendable. "They have truly earned the title of trustworthy public servants," Valisno explained.

Benjo Basas, National Chairperson of the Teachers' Dignity Coalition sent his congratulations "for a job excellently done. Despite all our reservations, we did our best for the successful conduct of the first national automated elections."

Synergy and partnership

"Because of the synergy between government agencies and the private sector under the leadership of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, majority (76%) of our regional election operation centers (14 of 17) reported smooth and orderly conduct of elections," reported Valisno.

"Our partnership with the Commission on Elections, Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and Manila Electric Company (MERALCO) bore fruit," expressed Valisno. "Our teachers are prepared to use the machines, thanks to COMELEC. They were at ease while serving even with threats of legal charges because they know that lawyers from DepEd and IBP will be there to support them. They were comfortable with the security provided by PNP and AFP. In cases of power interruptions, they were immediately restored because of the support of MERALCO and electric cooperatives nationwide."

Crowd control

The automated elections adopted precinct clustering that resulted to overcrowding in polling places. "In past elections, our teachers are used to handle less than 100 voters, but under this new system, they accommodate as many as 600 voters and the long queue adding to it the heat and crowded rooms and waiting areas caused tempers to flare," Valisno noted.

To ensure orderly voting, some teachers used a numbering system and voting was done by batch of five or ten verified voters.

"We have to devise a system like this to ensure that every voter gets his turn in an orderly manner," said an elementary teacher in Sariaya, province of Quezon.

"Lakasan lang talaga ng loob ito kahit nangangamba kami na baka magloko ang makina at sisihin kami ng mga tao. (Even though we were worried that voters may blame us if the machines malfunction, we had to muster our courage and do our jobs)," another teacher said.

Cool mind amidst heat of elections

One Grade 1 teacher named Aliah Macabangon of Daramba Primary School in Lanao del Norte displayed a heroic act by protecting the PCOS machine assigned to her precinct from possible snatching by armed group.

Upon hearing shotguns in the area, she immediately hid with the PCOS machine remembering all the time the instruction of her superior, Schools Division Superintendent Dr. Maria Luisa B. Mutia, to protect the PCOS from any untoward incident. She said that she was helped by other teachers in hiding the machine and herself.

“Nagkagulo bigla sa labas. May mga malalaking lalaki na naka-civilian (clothes) ang nanghahampas ng mga chairs sa mga tao. Muntik na nga akong mamatay dun. (There was a commotion outside. Burly men in civilian clothing were hitting bystanders with chairs. I almost died.) This experience was a matter of life and death for me. Pero tinulungan ako ng mga ibang teachers kung san itatago ang PCOS machine. (My co-teachers helped me hide the PCOS machine),” she said.

In Urdaneta City, when some CF cards malfunctioned Juditha Esmeralda and other BEIs had to stay until five in the morning of May 11 in their assigned precincts to guard the PCOS machines and the uncanvassed ballots.

“Naghintay kami doon sa room habang hindi pa naayos yung mga CF cards. Umaga na kami sinabihan na hindi maaayos ang mga cards at kailangan pang dalhin sa Dagupan para sa reconfiguration. Ayaw naming iwan ang mga machines, kailangan naming magbantay. (We stayed in our assigned rooms while the CF cards are checked. It was morning already when we were told that the CF cards need to be reconfigured in Dagupan. We didn’t want to leave the machines.)” said Esmeralda.

Some teachers serving as BEIs in Mampayag, Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon, skipped their meals just to accommodate the heavy turn-out of indigenous peoples who want to vote.

“These teachers took their snack, lunch, and dinner at 7:00 pm already and stayed until 11:00 pm at the precincts to serve all the voters,” said Reynaldo Manuel, Assistant Division Superintendent of Bukidnon.

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