



Press Statement

11 December 2009

MBC STATEMENT OF CONCERN OVER RECENT COMELEC DECISIONS

The Makati Business Club expresses its grave concern over recent decisions issued by the Commission on Elections, particularly its Second Division. The Comelec's reversal of the 2007 electoral victories of Bulacan governor Joselito Mendoza and Isabela governor Grace Padaca is ominous because of its timing and political impact. We are just under five months away from next year's elections, where both officials will be running for re-election as frontrunners. Moreover, the unseating of Governors Mendoza and Padaca, both allied with an opposition political party, paves the way for the ascent to power of politicians identified with the Arroyo administration.

We are particularly alarmed by the Comelec's December 8 ruling on the case of Governor Padaca. Commenting on the poll body's decision, even President Arroyo's election lawyer Romulo Macalintal said that the invalidation of thousands of ballots that led to the disappearance of the governor's winning margin in 2007 "appears suspicious and incredible." He described the Comelec's conclusions as "very whimsical, capricious, and arbitrary."

When Governor Padaca won the highly prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Government Service in 2008, she was cited for trimming Isabela's debts by two-thirds, promoting a medical scheme that led to better medical coverage for her constituents, introducing a subsidy program for rice and corn farmers, raising the province's education and reforestation budgets, and tirelessly campaigning against illegal logging and gambling. Thus, in this Comelec ruling, the biggest loser is not Governor Padaca but her constituents who are being deprived of a leader of proven administrative competence, who embodies honest governance, and exercises political will in addressing the problems confronting their community.

Now, we await with much trepidation the Second Division's ruling on the electoral protest filed against Pampanga governor Ed Panlilio by another administration candidate. Not only in this decision but also in the conduct of next year's elections, we appeal to the Comelec to assert its independence as a constitutional body, prove that it will not succumb to any political pressure, and ensure that the people's will is not subverted. The Comelec must be beyond reproach. It cannot afford to lose the confidence of the people, for in the coming elections, the people's faith in democracy will be at stake.

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