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# Documentation and Assessment of ERV Response in the 2010 Elections

## *Vote Peace*

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## Background

Election period in the country brings about the best in various civil society organizations in terms of engaging the gamut of issues surrounding the elections. Among these organizations is the Consortium on Electoral Reforms. Since 2004, CER has already been engaging the elections through a monitoring initiative called Bantay Eleksyon. The main function of this project is to monitor different aspects of the elections including election related violence (ERV). While Bantay Eleksyon have significant contributions in pushing for a reliable and orderly elections, the CER's leadership realized that the Bantay Eleksyon networks needs to go beyond the confines of election monitoring to be more responsive and effective on dealing with chronic problems of Philippine election particularly fraud, anomalies, system irregularities and violence. They realized that they need to introduce active intervention measures for ERV prevention more than just data-gathering. Such realization gave birth to Vote Peace as the first national initiative attempting to weave and steer various local initiatives on ERV prevention into a national platform.

## Organizational Structural Leadership

Since Vote Peace is a campaign project operating within a given implementation period. It has project team and a functional coordination and network structure for practical purposes of implementing the project. Its structure has national, regional and provincial levels of operations. The network structure of Vote Peace basically functions a processing system to facilitate, coordinate and communicate national and diverse local initiatives among themselves.

The project team is headed by Mr. Ramon Casiple as its project director. Important decisions that impact the direction of Vote Peace are made with the approval of the Project Director. Another member of the project team is Mr. Patrick Patino who sits as the project coordinator. It has a project staff at the national level and Regional Project Teams (RPT) which are composed of project leaders or coordinators for Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. RPT members were initially recruited from the staff of CER. The primary purpose of the RPTs is to map out local situation in the region. They also serve as Task Forces that do initial mapping and networking to established linkages at the local level. After the Task Force accomplished the mapping of local efforts and building rapport with these local initiatives, the Task then ceases to exist. The major link for coordination and communication between the National Secretariat and the local initiatives is the VPRT (Vote Peace Response Teams). VPRT undergo training on ERV incidence monitoring and reporting with the National Secretariat as a measure to capacitate the VPRT in leading ERV monitoring at their own localities.

## ERV Responses

Vote peace conducted and prepared a series of activities as early as the early months of 2009 during the pre-election period leading to the Election Day and post election period. As observed in Table, election monitoring, focused on election-related violence incidence, was the major and persistent response activity initiated by VP, operating from pre-election to post-election period. The monitoring efforts of Vote Peace started in July 2009 until the entire election until June 30, 2009 when the incumbent President relinquishes the Office of the President. VP worked in conjunction with CER's Bantay-Eleksyon.

| Type of ERV Responses          | Specific Actions  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Pre-election Responses</b>  | Formation, training of Vote Peace Response Teams<br>Capacity-building for networks and VPRT on ERVI monitoring<br>Political Mapping<br>Networking<br>Monitoring of Pre-election ERVI<br>Peace-building activities such as dialogues, forums and peace covenants<br>Policy Advocacies<br>Coordinated preparation for Election Day Monitoring |
| <b>Election Responses</b>      | Monitoring of Election Day ERVI<br>Coordination among stakeholders  |
| <b>Post-election Responses</b> | Assessment of Election Day ERVI<br>Collation and General Assessment of ERVI data from pre-election to post-election period<br>Public report on the ERVI monitoring<br>Post-Election Assessment Conference   |

a. Pre-election Responses

*Recruitment and Training of Vote Peace Response Teams (VPRT)*

During the first two quarters of 2009 the immediate task of the project was to survey those areas labeled as election hotspots or those that are simply areas of concern during elections. This involved a start-up strategy of deploying Regional Project Teams to do mapping of local situations, establish networks with various organizations from which the group would serve as regional partners as Vote Peace Response Teams or VPRT.

In preparation for the 2010 elections, Vote Peace was able to attend the local initiatives from various election hotspots such as those of Abra-Multisectoral Group in Abra, Masbate Advocates for Peace (MAP) in Masbate, Aksyon Mindanao in Maguindanao, Bangsamoro Youth League in Lanao del Sur. It also attempted to recruit VPRT in areas where intense ERV is anticipated such as Compostella Valley, Davao City, Negros, Panay Islands, Basilan, Zamboanga Sibugay, Sarangani Sultan Kudarat and Northern Cotabato.

Vote Peace’s technical assistance for the capability-building of its partner and network organizations usually comes in the form of training seminars and manual provision. The primary recipients of these capacity-building measures are the VPRT members. The VPRT members were recruited from various local organizations and initiatives of different provinces from Luzon, Visayas to Mindanao. Some VPRT members were recruited from several local ERV prevention initiatives such as Abra Multisectoral Group in Abra, Masbate Advocates of Peace in Masbate, Bangsamoro Youth Leaders in Lanao del Sur, UF-HOPE in Zambasulta (Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi) area.

*Peace Covenants*

While Vote Peace believes in the intention of most peace covenants initiated by government, however, they find its implementation and procedures as simply symbolical and too procedural but lacks the

deeper appreciation and sustainability of peace-building. The typical peace covenant process criticized by VP was its one-shot type activities wherein candidates are simply invited to a gathering for a symbolic signing of a peace covenant. VP attempts to provide an alternative to these typical peace covenant system of the government that are usually one-shot and publicity-driven.

The alternative system of peace covenant by the Vote Peace treats its peace-building activities as a continuous effort rather than a one shot deal. For VP, covenants should be an output of a prior consultative process; hence such process takes time for peace-building to sincerely unfold. Rather than simply gathering candidates for the first time, Vote Peace tries to deepen the peace-building by facilitating a series of dialogue among several stakeholders from political candidates, state actors, political families and civil society prior to peace covenant signing.

An example of the application of alternative peace covenant process happened in Maguindanao. In this critical hotspot, Vote Peace partnered with an NGO called Aksyon Mindanao whose key intervention mechanism against ERV is through dialogue with warring clans with the assistance from council of elders. The series of dialogues facilitated by Vote Peace and Aksyon Mindanao centers on the settling of *rido* (inter clan conflict), a typical cultural condition enabling ERV in the ARMM region.

#### *Supporting local initiatives*

In the light of frequency and magnitude of ERV in Mindanao, VP formed Task Force Mindanao not only to monitor incidents of election violence but also to enact corresponding appropriate political response to electoral-political conflicts. The task force held its planning workshop last 26-27 October and determined the advocacy and intervention plans for a peaceful exercise of elections in Mindanao. The Task Force coordinate the activities of the various Vote Peace Response Teams (VPRTs) organized in different regions and potential election hotspot provinces in the island of Mindanao.

In some local initiatives such as the case of UF-HOPE, which is a regional initiative in Zambasulta area, VP participated in the core planning of its programs. Being a founding member of UF-HOPE, VP actively participated in planning for the deployment of their member organizations to strategic polling places to monitor the PCOS machine and any election related incident. This deployment planning of UF-HOPE was held last May 1, 2010 at Ateneo de Zamboanga University in coordination with PPCRV, AFP and other peace advocates.

The first VPRT training was conducted last 30-31 July 2009 at the Bayview Park Hotel in Manila. Most of the participants represented local initiatives at the election hotspot provinces of Luzon while some came from Western Visayas, Davao City and the ARMM. This first session formed the initial core of VPRT for the Luzon provinces. The next major VPRT training convened the core group of VPRT for the Mindanao island. It was held on 29-30 October 2009 at the Crown Regency Residence in Davao City. VPRT participants for this training came from Mindanao regions of Davao, ARMM, Zambasulta and Northern Mindanao.

VPRT training session starts by delving on the ERV challenges of the national and local election and roles and function of VPRT corresponding to these challenges. Using an ERV monitoring manual, Vote Peace staff shares the knowledge and standardized skills to VPRT members to identify and report whether an incident is an ERV or not. To establish a standard method of data-gathering and reporting of an ERV incident among the VPRTs, VPRT were trained how to use a standard template for reporting an ERV. Trained VPRT members were expected to relay and replicate their ERV monitoring skills to the members of their respective organizations. For example, after undergoing the VPRT training, representatives of Bangsamoro Youth Leader and the UF-HOPE network replicated their training workshop to the members of their respective organizations so that their respective organization can perform the functions as an election monitor for the 2010 elections.

*Policy Advocacies*

Vote Peace also engages concerned government agencies by supporting specific policies, programs and proposals. It advocates and supports specific policies and programs by attending technical working group meetings and planning meetings on the implementation of the gun ban. This particular advocacy on firearms regulations came after COMELEC struck down a proposal by the PNP to implement the gun ban as early as December in favor of implementing the rule during the established election period starting 90 days before the elections. Other than extending policy on period of implementation, Vote Peace supported moves for stricter penalties or punishment for gun ban violation. It supported one bill on Congress which makes gun ban violations non-bailable and subjected to life-time imprisonment.

As much as some candidates fear for their security given the volatile security conditions of some areas, Vote peace supported the allowable number of security personnel detail for any requesting candidate. It supported the maximum limit of three security personnel provided to any politician. VP argued that centralizing the approving authority and taking it away from the Local/Regional Police Directors can prevent interference and undue influence from local politicians.



The national secretariat of Vote Peace who regularly coordinates with vote peace teams nationwide.



One of the political education activities of the Vote Peace with their partners.

#### b. Election Day Responses

##### *Monitoring and Reporting of ERV Election Day*

The primary of response of VP during Election Day was to activate its VPRTs and engaged local initiatives in monitoring and reporting ERV which increase drastically during Election Day. Based from the monitoring data gathered from localities in all parts of the country, VP released a public report on the national state of ERV during the Election Day.

VP pursued different means of gathering ERVI data from its VPRTs and local networks. In the case of Lanao del Sur, the whole organization of BYL (Bangsamoro Youth Leaders) was tapped as ERV monitor. BYL members, having their identity disclosed as an election monitor, were deployed to several polling sites to directly observe and gather ERVI data. At the ground, VPRT evaluate whether an incidence is an ERV or not based on the ERV monitoring manual provided by VP. When an observation is validated as an ERV, the election monitor inputs such observation into a standardized reporting form and submits the report to BYL organization for the last round of validation. After the last stretch of data collation and validation, BYL then submits the collated data to the national secretariat of VP. BYL received some financial assistance from VP for the operations of its VPRT members during Election Day.

In Zambasulta (Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi) region, VP was able to gather ERVI data at a regional scale by tapping the existing pool of volunteers of UF-HOPE network as monitors of ERVI. Some VPRT members in the area trained the pool of UF-HOPE volunteers, mostly originating from NAMFREL and PPCRV, on how to perform ERV monitoring and reporting based on VP's monitoring manual. To accommodate the data-gathering specific to ERVI, UF-HOPE streamlined the ERV monitoring procedures of VP to their general election monitoring protocols so that all volunteer can monitors ERV. UF-HOPE also received some financial assistance from VP for the monitoring operations of its volunteers.

In Abra, since AMMSG has an established research arm which collects and process ERVI data, there was no need for VP to tapped volunteers from AMMSG as ERV monitors. Avoiding redundancy of efforts, VP then requested AMMSG to utilize their existing ERV data and include it to their national inventory of ERVI (Election-related Violence Incidence) data.



## Post-Election Responses

### *National Inventory of Alternative ERVI data for 2010 elections*

For the first time, Vote Peace produced an alternative national database of ERV incidence from all provinces of the country. Before this VP's database, PNP's national database was the only existing national dataset for ERV incidence. There are several important features of VP's ERVI database. First, the data can be arranged and presented in the timeframe of pre-election, Election Day and post-election. Second, the database can be disaggregated into provincial level; such provincial disaggregation of data facilitates a more nuanced, context-specific assessment of the ERV situation at specific local polities compared to the PNP data which are usually provided as a summed national data or disaggregated only at the regional level. Third, the production of the database underwent subjective observation and field survey of VP's monitors and networks. Lastly, as its most important feature of all, the database is easily accessible to the public. VP's database for ERVI is an important alternative to PNP's dataset since PNP is hardly transparent regarding its ERVI data; PNP National office usually argues for the political and security repercussion of their ERVI data as a justification to the non-disclosure of their ERVI database.

Based on their national inventory of ERVI, Vote Peace released a public report which highlighted a significant decrease of ERVI this 2010 compared to past elections. The report showed that the number of incidences fell to 150 this year, compared to 229 in the 2007 elections and 249 in the 2004 elections. There was only a slight drop in the number of fatalities from 121 in 2007 to 113 in 2010 between the 2007 and 2010 elections but the 2010 ERV fatalities was a significant reduction compared to the 189 fatalities of 2004. The number of casualties continually decreased also from 2004 to 2010. Whereas there were 468 casualties in 2004, and 297 casualties in 2007, numbers dropped to 241 this election year. In their report, Vote Peace attributed the reduction in the national count of ERVI to the Maguindanao Massacre incident as an eye-opener to the reality of election-related violence in the country and to necessity for a concerted, multi-faceted and multi-layered peace initiatives of civil society organizations and religious leaders.

### *Post-Election Assessment Conference*

Last July 1 to 2, 2010 at the Imperial Suites Hotel in Quezon City, Vote Peace 2010 gathered their partners and networks in the project to conduct a post-election assessment. A presentation on post-election challenges for peace was presented by Mr. Ramon Casiple and the Vote Peace Monitoring Report was presented by Mr. Norman Patino. The participants were also divided into workshop groups to generate insight and lessons from the conduct of 2010 election, and its resultant recommendations. Those participating local organizations and initiatives from different parts of the country, such as AMSG, MAP, BYL, UF-HOPE and BAPESDA, shared their own experiences and specific activities in ensuring peaceful election. Prominent personalities attended the event such as Police Chief Deona and Fr. Cacas of MAP, Commissioner Sarmiento of COMELEC and Governor Mangudadatu of Maguindanao.

During the presentation of workshop outputs, Vote Peace's contribution came out much clearer. Some participants argued Vote Peace focused more on monitoring while less on peace initiatives in their areas. Representatives from Lanao del Sur meanwhile noted that "multi-sectoral concerted efforts helped a lot in promoting the peaceful elections" as an insight regarding Vote Peace's initiatives." They also mentioned that the tools used in Voter's Education awakened the interest of the voting public and the secrecy of VPRT's identity facilitated the effective monitoring of ERV. Meanwhile, participants from UF-Hope Zambasulta Group noted that Vote Peace "enhanced local initiatives and strategies to address election violations and violence." However, they also recommended that Vote Peace review their roles and thrusts after the election. They also recommend that Voter's Education materials be improved and enhanced according to the local context.

### *Policy Recommendations*

Based on lessons learned from the 2010 elections, Vote Peace, in their public report, proposed the following recommendations such as: a) resolution of election-related violence incidences (ERVI) cases and prosecution of perpetrators, b) extending the duration of ERVI monitoring beyond the election period, c) inventory and review of firearms purchases of LGUs, d) reconciling the definition of ERVI with the court system, e) pursue dismantling of private armed groups (PAGs) and f) increase penalties on election offenses related to violence, force, coercion and intimidation.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### *Strengths and Achievements*

Vote Peace took some unprecedented steps in innovating ERV prevention efforts this 2010 elections. Through its ERVI national monitoring program, VP made for the first time an alternative ERVI database having several features which makes it a helpful source of public information on ERV situation. The accessibility of the VP's ERVI database significantly addresses the non-disclosure of ERVI data by the PNP. Such alternative source of public information, which can be disaggregated down to the provincial level and analyzed into specific time period of the electoral cycle, can facilitate localized and context-based analysis of ERV situation, thereby, informing the strategy and specific actions of local prevention initiatives. Moreover, the process of ERVI monitoring itself increases the sensitivity of network CSOs of VP to ERV as a critical issue of the electoral reform advocacy. For instance, aside from monitoring electoral anomalies, technical glitches and procedural issues, the ERV monitoring program facilitated and capacitated local electoral reform groups to include ERV as a critical electoral issue that demands programmatic monitoring. The capacity-building assistances provided by VP on its local networks such as ERV monitoring workshops and voter's education enhanced their participation and responsiveness to this ERV issue.

VP was also the first national initiative that attempted to weave the diverse local prevention initiatives from several provinces in the country and steer it into a national direction. The non-partisanship and specialization to ERV monitoring have largely facilitated the linking and engagements of VP with various local efforts. VP also contributed to the founding and core planning of some local initiatives.

During the post-election assessment conference of Vote Peace last July 2010, CSOs partners appreciated the efforts of Vote Peace in linking local efforts to a national network. The coming together of remarkable local initiatives and leaders both from government and civil society during post-election conference makes their partners aware that their own particular ERV prevention efforts relates and converges to an aggrupation of numerous initiatives at a national scale. An observed benefit of such convergence was the sharing and learning of each other's experiences in ERV prevention efforts and the larger electoral reform work. For instance, during the post-election conference, each local initiative shared with each other their own experiences, insights and assessment of their local efforts for the future improvement of their respective initiatives.

The national networking of Vote Peace resulted to building wider social capital that can fuel the advocacy and formulation of long-term prevention policies and programs on ERV. The Vote Peace network carries with it the potential of advancing a national campaign for long-term, deeper response to ERV such as national initiatives on reforming political institutions that can disable local political clans from employing private armies to execute ERV schemes. The diverse number of the CSOs engaging with Vote Peace has the human resources and expertise to engage with local and national government in crafting long-term solutions to ERV.



### *Challenges Ahead*

The 2010 ERVI database as a notable alternative to PNP database also has its own caveat. A typical principle observed in assessing the validity of an alternative database is its degree of conformity and precision with the more established traditional database; in this case, the validity of ERVI database must somehow contend with its coherence relative to the more established PNP database. A contention pointed out by Vote Peace themselves is the significant discrepancy of their total national count of ERVI with those monitored by PNP. Vote Peace monitored a total 150 ERVI for 2010 election while, on the other hand, PNP recorded a total of ERVI. Another point of dissonance between the database of Vote Peace and PNP are the criteria and standards used when it comes to evaluating whether a violent incident is an ERV or not. In order that the two database may be used to validate each other, there should be at least a harmonized standard of ERVI identification and, if not, at least a meta-data analysis of data discrepancy. Such data discrepancy can be partly explained by the limited capacity of VPRT to cover other high-risk areas and situation which the PNP, by virtue of its security expertise, is only capable of doing.

Based on the actual operations of the VPRT, the major outputs of Vote Peace tend to focus on monitoring and data-gathering of ERVI. VPRT turned out to be more of election monitor focusing on ERV incidence. Monitoring is necessary step for an informed response to violence; however other forms of response actions, such as direct conflict mitigation, quick feedbacks to security agencies for immediate security response, real-time mediation of erupting conflicting parties at the ground, etc, were not glaringly observed from the operations of VPRT. This might explain why some network organizations of VP during the post-election assessment were asking for other effective forms of ERV responses other than monitoring. Where will the VPRT feedback their monitored ERVI that can prompt immediate action from security agencies? To maximize the function of monitored ERVI data as an input for informed response, an expedient mechanism might be needed wherein such ERV information or even its anticipatory observation can be validated and used by security forces to intervene and deter real-time conflicts from erupting to an ERV incidence.

During their post-election assessment, some network organizations tapped as VPRT of Vote Peace, raised the question- what exactly will they do with the ERVI data that they have gathered? What short-term and long-term responses should have been developed from the monitoring data to effectively operationalize the thrust of VPRT as a response mechanism?

Local VPRTs and the partner organizations of Vote Peace at the grassroots are still waiting for the future thrusts from the National Secretariat regarding their ERV responses. Although the Vote Peace National Secretariat was able to present general recommendations addressing structural factors of ERV during the Post-Election Conference last July 2010, specific actions that can actualize these recommendations and spur further post-election participation and synergy among the Vote Peace partners networks were not yet discussed. One of the forward steps expected by the local VPRT members and the larger Vote Peace network is how exactly the ERVI data they all gathered will be effectively used to necessitate, craft and advocate long-term government policies to address deeper and structural factors of ERV such as loose firearms proliferation, armed political clans and private armies. Post-election identity crisis and the long-term sustainability of initial ERV prevention efforts are the usual challenges awaiting the multitude of ERV prevention after this 2010 elections; Vote Peace, more so being a national platform for the convergence and networking of multitude of local initiative, is not spared from this trend.