



## PANIC AT THE DISCO: A review of the Party-List System and 10 Party-List groups

Some tidbits about the Party-List System (PLS):

- The Party-List System of the Philippines is already more than 10 years old since it was first included in the 1998 national elections. Although it is much older than that if the provision for its legislation in the 1987 Constitution is considered.
- The PLS, as provided in Section 2 of Republic Act 7941, was expected to “promote proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives”. It was also designed to “enable Filipino citizens belonging to the marginalized and underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties, and who lack well-defined political constituencies but who could contribute to the formulation and enactment of appropriate legislation that will benefit the nation as a whole, to become members of the House of Representatives”.

Current perceptions of the PLS, however, show that there are bitterly-contested notions about how Party-Lists work and whether

they embody the spirit of the law that created it.

- Despite its existence for more than a decade, people are still not aware about or do not understand the PLS and the role of Party-Lists. A recent Pulse Asia Survey (conducted March 21-28, 2010) revealed that 6 out of 10 registered Filipino voters are unaware of the PLS. Sadly, there had been claims that this system is being used by politicians to serve their interests in Congress. It was once mentioned by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban in G.R. No. 147589, better known as *‘Ang Bagong Bayani-OFW Labor Party v. Commission on Elections’*: “Indeed, the law crafted to address the peculiar disadvantages of Payatas hovel dwellers cannot be appropriated by the mansion owners of Forbes Park”.
- The current list of accredited Party-List groups vying for congressional seats is being scrutinized after it was made public that some of these groups were fielded in as pawns of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, in a scheme to maintain a majority of her allies in the

House of Representatives. With a Congress favorable to her, it is believed this will facilitate Charter Change and the move to a parliamentary form of government. If President Arroyo wins a seat in Congress this coming elections (she is currently running as representative of the 2nd district of Pampanga), she will then have the chance to be elected as Prime Minister.

Such accusations of conspiracies being harped by many opposition groups remain unfounded. However, it is worthy to note the dubious origins and platforms of some of the Party-List groups that were accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). While there are already guidelines proposed by laws such as BP 881, RA 7941 and other relevant legislation, the Commission on Elections has no comprehensive guidelines or list of requirements for accreditation available to the public.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, now we ask: how are party-lists accredited in the first place? And how do we know if an accredited Party-List group indeed met the requirements and is truly representative of a legitimate sector?

<sup>1</sup> There is no available or accessible legislation for accreditation of Party-List organizations per se. What is only available is a process/criteria for the disqualification of Party-List nominees, which is stated in Comelec Resolution No. 8807, Section 6.

## How Party-List groups are accredited

Relevant to the process of accreditation to participate in the Party-List System, Sections 3 and 5 of RA 7941 state that any of the following can be a Party-List group:

- **Political party** – refers to an organized group of citizens advocating an ideology or platform, principles and policies for the general conduct of government, which, as the most immediate means of securing their adoption, regularly nominates and supports certain of its leaders and members as candidates for public office.
- **Sectoral party** – refers to an organized group of citizens belonging to any of the sectors (“*labor, peasant, fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, elderly, handicapped, women, youth, veterans, overseas workers, and professionals*”) whose principal advocacy pertains to the special interests and concerns of their sector.
- **Sectoral organization** – refers to a group of citizens or a coalition of groups of citizens who share similar physical attributes or characteristics, employment, interest or concerns.
- **Coalition** – refers to an aggregation of duly registered national, regional, sectoral parties or organizations for political and/or election purposes.

While it is ideal that the PLS serves as a mechanism for proportional representation, the dominant interpretation now is that the PLS is for the representation of the marginalized sectors.

Working within the currently accepted legal interpretation — that is a designed exclusively for the marginalized sector — the following operationalization of this requirement is provided below:

1. Does it represent a sector?
2. Does it pursue an ideology or political idea/s?
3. Is the population of the sector large?
4. Does the sector have a decisive role in national production and basic social services?
5. Does it experience an extensive degree of “marginalization”?
6. Is representation in government, particularly in the legislature, notably absent?
7. Is this absence going to be problematic for the consolidation of general interest?
8. Is it identified with groups prone to exploiting loopholes in the Party-List law?

## The Real Deal

For illustration purposes, Pop2010 takes a closer look at 10 of the (currently) 112 accredited Party-List groups in order to see whether these accredited Party-Lists are legitimate representatives of the marginalized sector they claim to stand for. The following Party-Lists were chosen via random sampling to ensure impartiality.

### 1. 1-AANI

Among the noticeable characteristics of a majority of accredited Party-Lists is their penchant to start their short names with the number 1 or the letter A. This particular Party-List was supposedly founded in Leyte and Samar, and represents the sectors of subsistence farmers and fishermen.<sup>2</sup> It boasts the support of Aurora Congressman Sonny Angara, Quezon City council candidate Mike Planas, Davao City congressional candidate Ruy Elias Lopez<sup>3</sup>, and many others. While it claims to be

a sectoral party-list, it actually only represents farmers and fisherfolk in isolated municipalities, and it is even competing with other similar Party-Lists that, in effect, fragment their representation. Furthermore, having chapters in non-agricultural (i.e. Quezon City) areas puts its integrity into question.

### 2. AAMBIS-OWA (ANG ASOSASYON SANG MANGUNGUMA NGA BISAYA-OWA MANGUNGUMA, INC.)

This is another Party-List seeking to represent the agricultural sector. It supposedly “seeks to fight for a comprehensive and sustainable legislative agenda for marginalized farmers. Through a common voice, AAMBIS-OWA wishes to bring attention and find rightful solutions to the grassroot [problems] of the agricultural industry.” The group categorically seeks for “simple and essential solutions as seen from

the eyes of the poorest farmers in the country.”<sup>4</sup> It supposedly has a membership of around 36,000 by 2007, covering areas beyond Region VI. However, its first nominee, Sharon Garin-Spijkstra, is a daughter of former Philippine Coconut Authority Administrator Oscar Garin, Sr. and incumbent San Joaquin, Iloilo mayor Ninfa Serag-Garin, a member of the ruling party Lakas-CMD-Kampi.

### 3. AHON (AHON PINOY)

Seeking to represent the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), Ahon Pinoy is claiming to “engage and intensify a campaign to assure OFWs that public funds intended for their welfare is not wasted”. The group promises to “provide services to OFWs and their families for whom the government has no welfare programs that provide meaningful benefits. [And] Maximize the amount of OFWs funds—estimated to have reached P14 billion—held

in trust by the government through the OWWA, the OFWs and their families.”<sup>5</sup> However, it has drawn the suspicion of pollwatching organizations CenPEG and Kontra Daya for allegedly being an Administration-backed pseudo-partylist.<sup>6</sup> Its first nominee, Dante Ang II, is the son of Manila Times CEO Dante A. Ang, a former publicist of President Arroyo.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. AMA (ANG MATA'Y ALAGAAN)

This group supposedly represents the sector of disabled blind people. AMA promises to “craft legislations which will strengthen the programs and activities of the national government to protect the blind Filipinos. It is also the aim of AMA to craft relevant legislations which will ensure effective and useful programs for the prevention and early detection of vision impairment.”<sup>8</sup> It must be noted that they mention the Party-List as “a personal crusade for the Go Tong Family,” citing their ancestors’ suffering from blindness as a motivation for running. They even mentioned that “in the latest generation of the Go Family, Mr. Joel Go is tasked to be the frontrunner in the fight against blindness through AMA.”<sup>9</sup> It can be observed that the group is trying to separate the blind from the general disabled sector.

#### 5. ANAD (ALLIANCE FOR NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY)

One of the more controversial Party-Lists associated with the current administration, ANAD proclaims it “was organized to counter, expose and oppose the deception and lies of the communist propagandists in Congress. ANAD is aware that there are representatives in the Lower House who are members of the communist terrorists or are used by them to ‘JOIN THE GOVERNMENT TO DESTROY THE GOVERNMENT’.”<sup>10</sup> While it supposedly seeks to alleviate “the plight of the Filipino poor by enacting laws towards poverty alleviation and economic concerns,” its rhetoric always goes back to anti-communist demagoguery. Its first nominee, Pastor Alcover Jr., has been known to have maligned President Corazon Aquino’s contribution to the EDSA Revolution<sup>11</sup>, and is alleged to have ties with the notorious former General Jovito Palparan, now a representative of Bantay Party-List and a senatorial candidate.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6. BINHI (BINHI: PARTIDO NG MGA MAGSASAKA PARA SA MGA MAGSASAKA)

While this Party-List proposes “to improve the quality of life of our PRESENT and FUTURE generation of low-income SEED GROWERS, FARMERS and FISHERFOLK,

and to sustain FOOD SECURITY nationwide;”<sup>13</sup> there is very little information as to the extent of its membership and its ability to prove its capability to represent the farming sector. Pacifico Rico Fajardo, their first nominee, was former representative of Nueva Ecija, was once an administrator of the Light Rail Transit Authority, and was allegedly tasked to “maintain” GMA’s lead in Nueva Ecija in the 2004 elections.<sup>14</sup>

#### 7. AG (ANG GALING PINOY)

The most controversial Party-List candidate to date, Ang Galing Pinoy supposedly “is a multi-sectoral national party that claims to represent security guards, tricycle drivers and vendors. The top 3 nominees of AG are elected officials from Pampanga and members of the ruling coalition Lakas-CMD-Kampi: presidential son and Pampanga Rep. Mikey Arroyo, Lubao Mayor Dennis Pineda and Bacolor Mayor Romeo Dungca.”<sup>15</sup> There is no information as to its membership and statutes in available and accessible data sources. The group is only receiving much attention from the press due to Mikey Arroyo’s nomination.

#### 8. KALAHI (KALAHI SECTORAL PARTY)

The party claims to represent OFWs and has a following of 499

<sup>2</sup> “1-AANI PARTY-LIST.” *Facebook*. <<http://www.facebook.com/pages/1-AANI-PARTY-LIST/315706486851>>, accessed 13 April 2010.

<sup>3</sup> “Lopez is still under deliberation for a motion for disqualification filed at COMELEC. Reynaldo Santos Jr., “More than 100 disqualified local bets still on the ballots,” *ABS-CBN News.com*. <<http://abs-cbnnews.com/nation/03/30/10/more-100-disqualified-local-bets-still-ballots>>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> *AAMBIS-OWA Partylist*. <<http://www.aambis.com/aambis.html>>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> “AhonPinoy, welfare program for OFWs.” *Ahon Pinoy*. <<http://www.ahonpinoy.net/advocacy.php>>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> “Mikey as partylist rep destroys essence of partylist system,” *KontraDaya.org*. <<http://kontrada.org/?p=308>>, accessed April 13, 2010. See also Ely Manalansan, “Party List: Shortest Route to Power and Danger Signals,” *CenPEG.org*, <[http://www.cenpeg.org/POL%20CURRENTS/ELI\\_commentary.htm](http://www.cenpeg.org/POL%20CURRENTS/ELI_commentary.htm)>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> “The Manila Times College,” *Wikipilipinas.org*. <[http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=The\\_Manila\\_Times\\_College](http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=The_Manila_Times_College)>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> “AMA Partylist,” *Facebook*. <<http://www.facebook.com/amapartylist>>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> “AMA Partylist Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s),” *AMA’s Site*. <<http://amapartylist.multiply.com/journal/item/2/2/>>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> “Alliance For Nationalism And Democracy (ANAD),” *Facebook*. <<http://www.facebook.com/anadpartylist?v=info>>, accessed April 15, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> “Alcover disputes accounts on EDSA revolution,” *SunStar Cebu*. August 7, 2009 <<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/alcover-disputes-accounts-edsa-revolution>>, accessed April 15, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> “NPA to Nograls: stop links to Palparan-Alcover gang,” *Davao Today*. April 17, 2010, <<http://davaotoday.com/2010/04/17/npa-to-nograls-stop-links-to-palparan-alcover-gang/>>, accessed April 19, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> “BINHI PARTY LIST MISSION, VISION and PLATFORMS,” *Cabanatuan City Seed Growers Multi-Purpose Cooperative*. <<http://binhi.0fees.net/index.php?id=4>>, accessed April 15, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> “Questions raised over deal of Lakas-CMD and Balane; Some Nueva Ecija leaders call alliance a ‘big farce’,” *Manila Bulletin*, May 9, 2004 <[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_7968/is\\_2004\\_May\\_9/ai\\_n33718698/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7968/is_2004_May_9/ai_n33718698/)>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> “Get to know the party-lists (Pat 2 of 3),” *Philippine Online Chronicles*. April 16, 2010 <<http://www.thepoc.net/thepoc-features/politi-ko/2010-election-watch/5976-get-to-know-the-party-lists-part-2-of-3.html>>, accessed April 19, 2010.

in the social networking site Facebook so far.<sup>16</sup> However, it has already drawn the ire of election watchdogs like Kontra-Daya for “[buying] votes with insurance card, money and groceries, and even movie passes,” with the “insurance card show[ing] that the *Kalahi* Party-List has ties with ruling coalition Lakas-CMD.”<sup>17</sup> Its leading nominees include Apostol Poe Gratela, who worked for Malacañang’s Office of External Affairs, and Eleazar P. Quinto, Acting Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

## 9. PBA (PUWERSA NG BAYANING ATLETA)

Chaired by renowned boxer and “People’s Champ” Manny Pacquiao, this group seeks “to represent the Filipino athlete in more than just the sporting arena but in the pursuit of a life worthy of all hard-working Filipino citizens.”<sup>18</sup> The athletic sector, as noted in RA 7941, is not included among the valid sectors. Its nominees include

former Quezon City representative Miles Roces (who was barred from running for re-election after serving 3 terms) and Manny Pacquiao’s brother Bobby, who is also a boxer.

## 10. PEP (PARENTS ENABLING PARENTS COALITION PARTY)

This Party-List was formed by the group of parents who filed a case against Pacific Plans Inc. for failing to own up to its inability to grant education plans to their children. It “envisions a Pre-Need industry of the Philippines that delivers its commitment to its Planholders and a governing body that ensures the delivery of these commitments”, and has a mission of “promoting truth and good governance in the pre-need industry of the Philippines and the bodies that govern the industry; and fighting for justice for the victims of the pre-need industry.”<sup>19</sup> From their propositions, the group appears to have neither an ideology nor a valid sector being represented.

Using the currently acceptable criteria of marginalization for reviewing Party-List applicants, we present a table that shows whether these groups passed or failed (See Table 1).

We can definitely see that a majority of our sample Party-List groups failed to meet even just the currently acceptable criteria of marginalization. Despite AAMBIS-OWA and BINHI meeting at least some important indicators for representation, the sample Party-Lists were all associated in one way or another to the current ruling political party of Lakas-Kampi-CMD, if not former members of the government bureaucracy. It must also be noted that majority of these Party-Lists only recently surfaced and have not done any relevant work that has been able to alleviate the conditions of the sectors they claim to represent (except perhaps PEP, who was already working for the interests of the Pacific Plan holders, which, however, is not a valid sector). Furthermore, these marginalized sectors were already being represented adequately and effectively by other existing Party-Lists, working for the holistic representation of various sectors.

The questionable nature of some of the accredited Party-List groups can be problematic should they eventually win congressional seats. This is also an indication of a flawed accreditation system of the COMELEC. The COMELEC should, therefore, clarify their accreditation criteria and process, and make them known to the public. Getting the right and valid groups to run for Party-List is a step towards effective and just representation of marginalized sectors.

TABLE 1. Evaluation of Sample Party-Lists based of Proposed Criteria

Name of Party-List	OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE ACCEPTABLE CRITERIA								TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1-AANI	☒	☒	☒	☑	☑	☒	☑	☒	3/8
AAMBIS-OWA (ANG ASOSASYON SANG MANGUNGUMA NGA BISAYA-OWA MANGUNGUMA, INC.)	☑	☒	☒	☑	☑	☒	☑	☒	4/8
AHON (AHON PINOY)	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☑	☒	☒	1/8
AMA (ANG MATA'Y ALAGAAN)	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☑	☑	2/8
ANAD (ALLIANCE FOR NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY)	☒	☒	☑	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	1/8
BINHI (BINHI: PARTIDO NG MGA MAGSASAKA PARA SA MGA MAGSASAKA)	☑	☒	☒	☑	☑	☒	☑	☒	4/8
AG (ANG GALING PINOY)	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☑	☒	☒	1/8
KALAH (KALAH SECTORAL PARTY)	☑	☒	☒	☑	☒	☑	☒	☒	3/8
PBA (PUWERSA NG BAYANING ATLETA)	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☑	☒	☒	1/8
PEP (PARENTS ENABLING PARENTS COALITION PARTY)	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☑	☒	☑	2/8

<sup>16</sup> “KALAH Party List”, Facebook. <<http://www.facebook.com/pages/KALAH-Party-List/414060112541>>, accessed April 15, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> “Palace-backed’ party list group buying votes in Davao – report”, *GMA News.tv*. May 12, 2007 <<http://www.gmanews.tv/print/41990>>, accessed April 13, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> “Our Mission, Vision, and Agenda”, *Puwersa ng Bayaning Atleta: Philippine Party-list*. <<http://www.pbapartylist.com/pba-party-list-mission.php>>, accessed April 15, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> [http://pepcoalition.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=45&Itemid=109](http://pepcoalition.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=45&Itemid=109)

### Editorial Board

Dr. Antonio G.M. La Viña  
Joy Aceron  
Mary Grace Santos

### Contributing Writers

Hansley Juliano  
Glenford Leonillo  
Rafaela Mae David  
Phillip Don Recentes

*Poolitkang Pinoy 2010 (PoP 2010)* is a monthly election fact sheet published by the Ateneo School of Government (ASoG) with support from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

For comments and suggestions email [political\\_democracy@yahoo.com](mailto:political_democracy@yahoo.com).

