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Foreign observers watch the Davao elections

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[By GERMELINA LACORTE](#) [Davao Today](#)

DAVAO CITY—Foreign observers said they're aware that Filipinos will be braving bullets and bribes in today's first ever automated elections but hope that their presence will deter electoral fraud.

"I am here to observe, to monitor and to report what I see," said Lawyer Radhika Sainath, a civil rights lawyer from Los Angeles, California. "Filipinos will be braving bullets, bribes and voting machine breakdowns to make their voices heard," she said. "We hope that our presence will help deter and expose any potential election-day fraud."

Sainath arrived in Davao on the eve of the elections with eight other delegates of the 80-member People's International Observers' Mission (PIOM) from 12 countries to observe and monitor the conduct of elections in the Philippines. The international delegation will particularly take note on possible electoral fraud and violence, how the automated election system is carried out and to draw the world's attention to the democratic process in the Philippines.

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On the eve of the elections, voters flock to SIR Matina to check their precinct numbers to avoid the crowd on the election day. (davaotoday.com photo by Jose Hernani)

“I want to help the Filipino people feel more secure in going to the polls,” Sainath told reporters during the press briefing at UCCP’s Haran. “Studies show that people feel more comfortable with foreign observers’ presence in the polling places.”

Sainath, who will be going to the Santa Cruz town of Davao del Sur noted for heavy presence of soldiers, said she hopes that her presence will make Filipinos feel more comfortable when they cast their votes today.

She also said she wants to observe how the presence of soldiers in Santa Cruz affects voters. “We want to know how the increased presence of the army and the police help voters; whether they contribute to the climate of fear.”

She said that when the culture of corruption and violence prevails, no amount of automation in the elections could prevent electoral fraud.

The delegates will stay up to the counting of votes and will issue an extensive report upon returning to Manila and their home countries. “We want to pressure governments around the world to respect and support the democratic rights and the human rights of the Filipinos, particularly the US which is giving military aid to the Philippines,” she said.

Bishop Constante Claro of the United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP) in Southern Mindanao, said automated polls seemed to have increased fear of possible manipulation. “I hope that no automated cheating will occur under the automated election system,” Claro said. ([Germelina Lacorte/davaotoday.com](http://GermelinaLacorte.com/davaotoday.com))

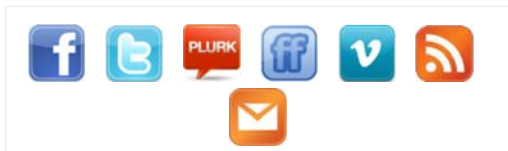
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