



# PRESS RELEASE

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## 'Soldiers involved in election cheating will face dismissal'

SOLDIERS, particularly officers, who will be caught involved in cheating in the coming election will be dealt with accordingly, including facing dismissal from service.

Defense Secretary Norberto Gonzales gave this stern warning in his command visit Friday to the Southern Luzon Command in Camp Nakar, Lucena City even as he emphasized that the country's Armed Forces should do their poll duties in May.

"There will be no military officers engaged in partisan politics or coercing others for the benefit of some politicians," Gonzales emphasized, noting that the military establishment must gain the respect and trust of the people in the forthcoming election after being involved in controversies in previous polls.

Gonzales said the military should be in the election because it cannot extricate itself from past poll controversies by "shying away" from its Constitutionally-mandated electoral duties.

"We will be there. We will do our duty. But we will be truly non-partisan," he declared. "Our people will love you for that."

"Our role during election is to safeguard its sanctity. Not to engage in partisan politics. Not to engage in cheating," he added. "Politicians come and go, but the Armed Forces will stay."

Gonzales urged the military to protect candidates from extortion activities of the New People's Army, to intercept moneys for vote-buying and to disarm and drive away armed supporters of candidates.

"Private armed groups and underworld characters employed by politicians must be identified by the intelligence community, disarmed, disbanded and banished. Use the media in exposing them," the defense chief said.

He noted that there are now many NPAs "moonlighting as goons of politicians." "Next time I come here, I want you to have a list of all private armed groups in your area," Gonzales told the officers of Solcom.

Gonzales reiterated that he had put the AFP at the full disposal of the Commission on Elections because he wanted to prove that it is the true guardian of the country's democracy.

"We will help COMELEC do its job. This is crucial in regaining our credibility during elections." he said.

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