A message from the Founding Chairman
Jose S. Concepcion, Jr.

EDSA Revolution will always remind me of the individual acts of heroism and courage of many ordinary citizens, who I regard as the unsung heroes under the banner of NAMFREL.

During the 1986 Snap Election, NAMFREL harnessed hundreds of thousands of volunteers nationwide to come out and protect the ballot boxes and conducted the Operation Quick Count. NAMFREL provided a constructive and positive way of action for every Filipino who were concerned about the future of our country. The results of the Snap Election in the NAMFREL OQC center in De La Salle Greenhills, showed that Cory Aquino won with 7,502,601 votes compared to the 6,787,556 for former President Marcos. This record has since been enshrined at the NAMFREL National Tally Board and also one of the mementoes treasured at the De La Salle Greenhills, together with all the Election Results from 1986 to 2010 Elections.

Mr. Richard Kessler from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace based in Washington D.C. nominated NAMFREL for the Nobel Peace Prize Award, in recognition of the important role that NAMFREL played in ensuring a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in the 1986 Philippine Presidential Election. NAMFREL has set a standard not only for the Philippines but for other nations as well, showing how a few people can change the world for the better.

But what NAMFREL achieved for the country did not come without a price, and for some of our volunteers, that price that had to be paid was the ultimate sacrifice.

The 8 NAMFREL Heroes who gave their lives while safeguarding the ballot, from Capiz, Pampanga, and other provinces, are the following:

Rodrigo Ponce  Jaime Alcala  Cresencio Barcuma  Fructuoso Javines  Irineo Magbanua  
Alexis Parao  Samuel Moulic  Dan Sarmiento

One story is that of Mr. Rodrigo Ponce from Mambusao, Capiz, an ordinary farmer with an extraordinary courage and love for his country, protected the ballot box when unidentified armed men stormed the polling station and started shooting at everyone. He was quick enough to cover the ballot box with the Philippine Flag. He unfortunately died while clutching the ballot box in his heroic attempt to protect it. His courage served as inspiration and reignited the spirit of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers serving nationwide during the 1986 Presidential Election.

After that fateful 1986 Presidential Snap Election, I was constantly surprised and overwhelmed by the outpouring of the
citizenry’s desire to have a free and fair election. I would also like to pay tribute to the other three volunteers who died in the line of duty, namely:

**Neoldino del Corro  Abdulhak Balabadan  Hamlet Cunales**

These unsung heroes together with the hundreds of thousands of NAMFREL volunteers nationwide, who suffered intimidation and violence, will continue to inspire all of us as we continue our fight for Free and Honest elections that are truly reflective of the will of the people.

They believed that “it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness”. This will be a meaningful testament to the way that we all lived for our country and as we continue to do our commitment to uphold the principle and fight for free and fair elections. I believe that the sacrifice of our unsung heroes has not been in vain.

**This was my race, a race of courage and faith**
- Cynthia Mendoza (San Juan)

I had signed up for NAMFREL after hearing a call for volunteers at my workplace. An initial phone call matched us with chapters nearest out homes. I can still see our San Juan Namfrel Pollwatchers’ group sitting very solemnly around long wooden tables in a workshop for our first organizational meeting. After so many years of Martial Law, we were up against impossible odds. We were David, and our opponent was Goliath. Our chapter’s leaders were true models of courage, conviction and inner strength. I will always remember Mrs. Africa's reassuring smile, her calm voice, and carefully chosen words. She will always stand out in my mind and heart as an example of dignified composure and quiet wisdom. Sometimes as Josie Palad efficiently explained the polling center’s set-up, or the correct way for a pollwatcher to file a protest, her voice would quiver, and I thought perhaps it was because she fully appreciated the gravity of what she was explaining to us. Even though our only aim then was to guard the ballot against ANY side that would have tried to use dirty tactics in the elections, those were days in the Philippines when groups like ours could be arrested for meeting in such a manner, and for such a cause.

I woke up very early on February 7, 1986, with my “kacha” NAMFREL vest and meeting my fellow volunteers in Pinaglabanan Elementary School before the polls opened that morning. We were told to bring our own “baon” and cameras (even if they were old or broken and had no film inside). We just wanted to let everyone know there would be no secrets during the elections, and that the process would be open and transparent to all. We were watching, and because of each person’s small efforts, the whole world would be watching.

I felt so bad for a fellow volunteer, Mark Quintanar, when he sat in for me for a few minutes at my polling place so that I could cast my vote in another classroom. As I left my broken instamatic camera with him, some men walked into the classroom and intimidated Mark, ordering him with rough voices to put the camera away. Mark bravely stayed seated where he was. In another classroom, as I stood in line to vote, a couple of drunk men came into the classroom and shouted at us, saying, “Puwede ba, mga Namfrel, umalis na kayo dito--mga abala lang kayo rito.” It was frightening and upsetting, but I was still able to vote.

As polling hours ended, a nun accompanied us when we delivered our ballot box to the San Juan City Hall with the help of the Namfrel volunteer drivers. I could see throughout the day how well organized we were.

We arrived at the San Juan City Hall in darkness. The electric power had been shut off, and people had formed two lines of “kapit bisig” to protect the path where the ballot boxes were carried to make sure they made it to the entrance of the building. As we passed there, the people sang “Bayan Ko” in grave, solemn tones. Because the power had been cut off, people gathered outside the City Hall buildings, straining to find out what was going on inside. A young boy in shorts and t-shirt climbed the trunk of a palm tree and shouted into the windows above, “Hindi nyo na kami madadaya ngayon!”

At that moment I saw the best of the Filipino. This was my race, a race of courage and faith.

These are some of my most enduring memories from those days of courage and bravery, when I learned that indeed it was “better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.” I know there have been discouraging events along the way, but I resolve to remember the purest, most selfless acts of those days, because those are the truest qualities that remind me who the Filipino really is.
This was two days before the Snap Presidential election on February 7, 1986. Threats were ripe that the roads would be spiked so that the Namfrel Cebu city support team going to the controlled areas in the north could not deploy.

One of the solutions was to get the lead truck to sweep away the spikes to make it safe for the convoy carrying volunteer pollwatchers for Danao city, Borbon, Carmen, Tabogon, etc., to reach their destinations and watch the elections. I was a poll watcher in Tabogon then; and among the five hundred or so Support Group volunteers."

- Telibert Laoc (Cebu)

Anecdotes from Namfrel operations during the 1986 Snap Presidential Elections
- Augusto Lagman (La Salle Greenhills)

1 Change in Comelec rules

Marcos’ Comelec must have realized how effective Namfrel’s operations were in the 1984 Batasan elections (both in poll watching and Operation Quick Count, or OQC) that, unable to ban Namfrel in the 1986 Snap Presidential Elections due to international pressure, they did what they thought was the next best thing. They created a competing “quick count” operation, which they called Super Quick Count. We called it the PICC Count. (Yes, that was the count based at the PICC and from which the encoders walked out when they noticed the manipulation being done behind closed doors.)

But while they didn’t find too much difficulty organizing the headquarters and equipping it with computers, they had no way of building up the field organization. How then would they get the source documents (precinct results) for their tabulation? So again, they did the next best thing … no, I should say, the best thing. Comelec required Namfrel to furnish the PICC Count with a copy of Namfrel’s source documents (Precinct Tally Forms, or PTFs). That was really a foul move – asking US to provide THEM with OUR documents - but Namfrel had no choice. It had to agree. It’s like playing a card game where you have to share your good cards with your opponent. How can you win?

But the worst was yet to come.

The Friday before the February 7, 1986 elections, Chris Monsod, who was Namfrel’s Secretary-General, was called by Comelec for a meeting. He looked very distraught when he came back to La Salle Greenhills (LSGH). This time, Comelec wanted Namfrel to submit all three copies of its source documents to the Comelec Registrar (CR) first for his “review”, and then it is he who will distribute the copies to Namfrel and the PICC Count. Grrr …

Of course, we knew what would happen. After we’ve submitted the documents, the CR would hold on to them and would become scarce, thus jeopardizing our OQC. As expected, that was exactly what happened on election night … and the days following. But I’m getting ahead of the story.

When Chris came back to LSGH, he immediately called for an emergency meeting. And there we hatched a plan. We would ask Namfrel’s field chairpersons to photocopy the documents first before submitting same to the CR. Tough, but doable.

And it worked! The field people spent the weekend looking for photocopiers they could borrow. And thus was the Namfrel OQC saved.

2 Commissioner Opinion

The Namfrel strategy worked. After receiving the Precinct Tally Forms (PTFs) from the voting centers, the Municipal Chairpersons photocopied the forms before submitting them to the Comelec Registrar (CR), as
required by the Comelec. As Namfrel expected, the CR held on to the PTFs with the intention of delaying our count. The photocopies therefore became Namfrel’s main source documents for its tabulation.

Comelec naturally couldn’t understand how Namfrel could tabulate votes and release results to the public. It knew that the CRs were holding on to most of our documents. It didn’t take two days before we got a call from Comelec Commissioner Opinion. The call was passed on to me by the volunteer manning the phones.

“Yes, Commissioner, how can I help you?” I asked.

“Where are you getting your figures? They are spurious. You better stop your tabulation,” he barked. I explained that we only get our figures from legitimate PTFs and that we were receiving them regularly from the field. “Impossible!” he was almost shouting.

After a few minutes of talking to him and giving the same explanation, I was already running out of words to say. Just then, I saw Chris Monsod coming. I said, “Chris, Commissioner Opinion on the line asking where we are getting our numbers.”

I don’t think I bothered to wait to find out what Chris told him. I just wanted to be far enough lest Chris handed me back the phone.

3 Raymond

The Namfrel count was increasing by the day. The PICC count was not. Word got out that the Comelec was planning to raid the Namfrel operations at LSGH, and confiscate our documents (the PTFs). If they did that, that would mark the end of the Operation Quick Count (OQC). We had to do something fast.

The solution: As the PTFs come in at the 3rd level of the La Salle gym, they would be recorded, then brought to the dormitories of the La Salle brothers at the ground floor of another building, where they would be photocopied. The originals would be kept in a locked room inside the dorm, while the photocopies would be brought back up to the 3rd level of the gym for encoding and then processing. This would entail borrowing as many photocopiers as we could. This would also entail asking a team of volunteers to bring down the PTFs to the dorm after they have been recorded and bringing up the photocopies from the dorm to the main processing floor at the 3rd level of the gym. Tedious, but we thought it would be better to play it safe.

I approached a friend who was a distributor of a popular brand of photocopiers and he gladly took care of our copy machine requirements. I then met with a group of male volunteers, explained to them the additional work we had to do, and asked those who were willing to go up and down the stairs (not the ramp) for a show of hands. More than a dozen raised their hands and I said that we had enough to start with.

I adjourned the meeting and everybody stood up to go. That’s when I noticed one of those who raised his hand, a short and skinny teenager. I noticed … because he walked with a very pronounced limp!

I wanted to tell him that this was not a job for a differently-abled person, but I didn’t. I just could not take away from him the opportunity to make a sacrifice for clean and honest elections. A really difficult sacrifice for his country.

4 Goons at the gate

It must have been mid-afternoon of the third or fourth day after the elections when we received the report that there was an anti-Namfrel demonstration being staged just outside the La Salle Greenhills gate. It was not a big group - certainly not more than a hundred people - but they had placards, they were shouting slogans, and they were rowdy. Even with that small number, however, the security guards of La Salle and Namfrel’s own security team would not have been able to stop them had the demonstrators decided to enter the gate. They left after a few hours with no untoward incident.

They came back the following day, at about the same time in the afternoon. This time, they were more unruly. They poured paint remover on some of the volunteers’ cars that were parked outside the gate and even broke some of the windshields. Later in the afternoon, they all left together.
Chris Monsod called a meeting and told us that if they came back the next day, we were to line up our cars side by side near the gym, facing the front gate. (There was no structure yet between the gate and the gym in 1986.) The plan was that, if the demonstrators stormed the gates, we were to get into our cars and, well ... run over them, as an act of self-defense. We would be completely within our rights since they would be trespassing on private property at that point. Still, we were all peace-loving Namfrel volunteers working for the peaceful conduct of elections and this situation was unfamiliar territory for us. But we didn’t have much choice; we needed some way by which we could defend ourselves and the work we were doing.

The following morning, Bach, one of the IT volunteers, whispered to me that there were several piles of 2 x 2 pieces of wood (dos por dos) in strategic points inside the gym. We would use them to defend ourselves from the would-be intruders. I felt a little more confident but wished nonetheless that I had martial arts skills.

The demonstrators came back in the afternoon, at the same time as the previous two days. They were just as noisy and rowdy, but, thank God, they didn’t storm the gates of La Salle. Then they left.

That’s when we realized that they were not true demonstrators; they were paid goons. They would always arrive at 2:00pm and leave at 5:00pm. They were being paid to create noise by the hour!

They didn’t come back the following day. They were just meant to intimidate and scare us. And maybe disrupt our operations.

5 Broken windshield

One of those whose car’s windshield was broken by the goons was our liaison with the police and military (how ironic!). He brought his car to the shop to be repaired. The shop owner asked him what happened and so he explained that he was a Namfrel volunteer and that a few days earlier there were hired goons who “demonstrated” in front of La Salle Greenhills and vandalized many of the parked cars. The shop owner, like most Filipinos during that period, of course, knew the significance of what Namfrel was doing. After the windshield was replaced, the shop owner told the Namfrel volunteer that the whole job was “on the house” – his humble contribution to the efforts of Namfrel.

6 Funds came from everywhere

It was a quiet afternoon, about a week from Election Day, when a journalist approached me at my post in the gym. She asked if I could grant her a short interview and I readily agreed. Her questions dwelt mostly on the logistics side of our operations. Her last question was, “Where does Namfrel get its funds?” She knew, of course, that one of Marcos’ conditions when he allowed Namfrel to do poll watching and run a quick count was that we may not accept funds from any foreign entity or individual.

I told her that there were local corporations, businessmen, and even private individuals who donated money to Namfrel. There were also donations in kind, like food and supplies that we needed for operations. The same with the borrowed PCs, mini-computers, gensets, and other equipment. There were also donations that came from ordinary people, like housewives, jeepney drivers, and students.

Just then, a man approached me and handed me an envelope. It said, “P265.35, from the San Pedro Elementary School, Grade V-3, Tondo, Manila”. I thanked the man, opened the envelope, then showed the contents to the journalist. I said, “Here’s a typical example. We have received quite a few of those – contributions from students.” She just nodded, understanding. And then she left.

A few minutes later, she came back, handed me something that was in her closed fist, then left without a word. I looked at what she gave me … three P100 bills. (Note: The name of the school is assumed and the amount inside the envelope, an estimate. Too long ago to remember.)

7 Box of fabricated results

After more than a week of silence, we finally received a whole box of PTFs coming from Ilocos Norte. I opened the box, then checked the forms. All of them had Marcos with 200-300 votes, and Cory Aquino with zero, or
almost zero votes. What’s more, the forms looked like they were filled up by only one man. Clearly, our Namfrel chairman or OQC Coordinator there had been compromised.

I reported this to Chris Monsod and I asked him if we were supposed to tabulate even obviously faked reports. He said he seemed to recall that if the results were statistically improbable, we could ignore them. But he said that he would check with Dick Romulo first because he had access to the rules.

After about an hour, Dick Romulo called Chris and explained to him that there was no such rule and that we should have to count all of them. With a heavy heart, I lifted the box and brought it to the Receiving Section for recording and later processing. I went back to my post.

Less than ten minutes later, I saw Ruffy, who headed the Receiving Section, walking towards me hurriedly. The look in his face was both of confusion and anger. “Gus,” he cried, “we can’t process those PTFs! They’re obviously fabricated.”

“I know” I said, “but we will.” And then I explained to him what transpired just an hour ago.

And so we did. But despite those votes, Cory Aquino still won in the Namfrel count by some 600,000 votes – certainly enough for her to declare the “Tagumpay ng Bayan”.

8 Early morning of February 22

Towards the end of the second week, the reports from the field were already coming in trickles. The Namfrel Council decided to close down our operations in Greenhills and just conduct our wrap up procedures at the RFM office along Pioneer St. We needed less volunteers but we still kept basically the same working hours.

I worked overnight on February 21, as I also did the previous nights. I was hoping that we could wind up our operations in just a few more days. In the early morning of the next day, we heard sketchy accounts of something going on in Camp Aguinaldo.

I left RFM at around 7:00 AM and decided to take a quick look at whatever it is that’s happening at the military camp. From the corner of EDSA and the White Plains road, I saw a crowd of 30-50 people just outside the side gate of Camp Aguinaldo. Curious, I drove towards them, parked the car, and saw a familiar face. “Hi Tony (Ortigas), what’s going on?” He told me what he knew about the Enrile-Ramos situation and that they were there to sort of provide support to the group. I joined them for about half an hour, then said good-bye with the promise that I’d come back after I’ve slept a few hours.

It must have been early afternoon when I woke up. My wife told me what she had heard from the radio and from her network of friends. I immediately left for Camp Aguinaldo and what greeted me there was the huge crowd of people gathered, this time, along EDSA in front of the camp. I joined some friends who got there earlier and we stayed on till late that night.

I came back the following day with my family, complete with food, water, and a transistor radio. The rest of the events are already in recorded history.

“EDSA People Power 1 was a monumental event in the history of the Filipino people that marked the end of an exploitive and corrupt regime. And Namfrel was a key player in this history, protecting the ballot boxes during the snap election, and joining the throngs of millions of Filipinos in EDSA during those tumultuous days of February. This peaceful revolt brought forth a reluctant housewife as President of the country and now, 25 years later, the reluctant son of the reluctant housewife President is President. This is truly one for the books. History seems to be giving the son a chance to complete what his mother had started but was not able to complete - - the promise of a progressive Philippines that offers a bright future for its citizens. For confluence of various reasons, the mother’s term failed in putting closure and a stop to corruption, and it has come back to haunt the country with vengeance. It is now the son’s turn, to deliver on his mother’s aspirations for the Filipino people and we in Namfrel, and the other civil society organizations, needs to remain vigilant and help the son succeed in this second chance. Let us thus use this 25th anniversary celebration of People Power to reinvigorate Namfrel in helping the son finish what his mother started 25 years ago.

More Power to Namfrel!” - David Balangue
Our votes are sacred
- Ana Eva Villanueva (Guimaras)

At that time the province of Guimaras -- still a sub-province of Iloilo -- had only three municipalities: Buenavista, Jordan, and Nueva Valencia. Fr. Sergio Jamoyot was chairperson for Guimaras and also for Jordan town. Because of his encouragement, I accepted the designation of vice-chairperson for the province and also chair for Nueva Valencia, and to recruit volunteers for Namfrel.

We had a training at Jaro Cathedral on pollwatching in every precinct on election day. Many people from all walks of life volunteered; everybody wanted reform for the country, and were eager to participate in this non-partisan effort. More people pledged to recruit volunteers for Namfrel and to assist them on election day. After being trained, the volunteers were able to recruit more people to join them. In my municipality, I had 250 volunteers.

Our volunteers didn't take any chances on election day and were well-prepared. In the town of Jordan, the volunteers had kerosene lamps; in every precinct, the teachers also had to be prepared with their own kerosene lamps, in coordination with the barangay officials.

On election day at Sta. Teresa Elementary School in the municipality of Jordan, the teachers had just started counting the ballots when at around 9pm, a man entered a precinct and snatched the ballot box. The Namfrel volunteers immediately called the attention of the barangay tanods and together ran after the ballot box snatcher in the dark. They were able to corner the snatcher and were able to retrieve the ballot box. Because of the incident, the boards of election inspectors decided to continue the counting at the municipal hall. The Namfrel volunteers carried the ballot boxes to the municipal hall.

We experienced being harassed by bodyguards of an administration candidate. There was rampant vote buying and intimidation. I requested the presence of foreign observers in Guimaras. Because of our experience in 1986, our Namfrel volunteers learned the importance of vigilance during elections. We've come to realize that indeed, “ang boto natin ay sagrado” (our votes are sacred), and we started educating the voters, especially young people, on how to carefully choose candidates to vote for.

We are proud to be a part of Namfrel and have always maintained its credibility and non-partisanship, which most citizens in all sectors of society have come to respect. Although it seems vote buying and intimidation could not be completely eradicated every election, we did and have been doing our part in helping the country have free, honest, and clean elections. In Guimaras we are always vigilant and remain determined to help the country, to maintain the respect and good reputation that we have earned.

If you have stories of your volunteer experience in the 1986 election, for possible inclusion in the next issue, please get in touch with us through secretariat@namfrel.com.ph.