

FILIPINOS CAST THEIR VOTES IN NEW CALEDONIA IN HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL TURNOUT

9 May 2007 — Consul General Maria Theresa Lazaro of the Philippine Consulate General in Sydney, Australia reported to the Department of Foreign Affairs that 300 Overseas Absentee Voters in New Caledonia voted over the weekend of 5 and 6 May 2007, achieving a voter turnout of 70% in that jurisdiction.

“Last Sunday, 6 May, New Caledonia witnessed two simultaneous elections taking place: the French Presidential election and the Filipinos' Senatorial and Party-List elections. We salute the patriotism of the more than 300 overseas Filipino voters who participated in achieving a 70 percent turnout in the voting in New Caledonia over the weekend. Their enthusiastic participation in ensuring the success of the exercise attests to the resolve that overseas Filipinos indeed and must have a say in our country's future,” Consul General Lazaro remarked.



Vice-Consul Ferdinand Victoria (left) together with the first voters at the start of the voting at the Goro Campsite in Yate, New Caledonia on 6 May 2007.

The Philippine Consulate General in Sydney, which has jurisdiction over New Caledonia, reported that a total of 314 Filipino overseas voters in that French territory successfully cast their votes in two separate venues, namely the Philippine Honorary Consulate office in the capital Noumea and the Goro Construction Project site in the town of Yate, a mountainous area some two hours south of the capital.

The Sydney-based team was composed of Vice Consul Ferdinand Philip Victoria and Mr. Guillermo Reyes.

Almost all of the Noumea-based Filipino voters, some of whom were dual citizens or have not participated in Philippine voting for

years, turned up within minutes of each other when they cast their votes in at the Honorary Consulate office on 5 May. At dawn of the following day, the team then proceeded to the Goro Project site, which was only practically accessible by ferry, where a significant number of Filipino voters had already begun to assemble at the voting center within the campsite at 8:00 a.m.

In an impressive display of solidarity, the assembled voters then shouted "*Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!*" as they raised their hands holding their envelopes containing their ballots. It also heralded the start of the voting, which ended at 6:00 PM.

The voters mainly came from the three Philippine construction companies that now manage a total of around 1,200 Filipinos at the site, namely, EEI Philippines, AG&P Philippines and

Prime Manpower-VINCI. The OFWs are currently constructing a US\$ 2 billion nickel and cobalt processing plant in a remote mountainous area located 80 km. south of Noumea, and is scheduled to be operational by 2008. Most of them, however, were only deployed or recruited after the Overseas Absentee Voting registration ended in October 2006 and thus were unable to participate in the voting.



The first Filipino voter at the Goro Campsite puts his ballot in the box in Yate, New Caledonia ahead of his other co-workers on 6 May 2007.

"The success of the undertaking was achieved through the very active coordination of the Philippine Honorary Consul in Noumea Max Diot, the managers from the EEI, AG&P and Prime Manpower-VINCI who effectively conducted seminars to the voters on the procedures of voting and disseminating the information campaign." Consul General Lazaro said.

New Caledonia is an autonomous Pacific Island territory under French administration located 1,979 km. east of Sydney. The Territory of New Caledonia is composed of 12 major islands with 33 cities and municipalities. Aside from its coral reefs,

beaches and other tourist spots, it is also known as the third largest nickel-producing area, with 25% of the world's known nickel resource found here. Consular jurisdiction over the territory was assigned to the Philippine Consulate General in Sydney since 1995. END