

# Filipino archbishop warns against big election spenders

MANILA, Philippines – Voters should not be easily swayed by politicians who spend excessively when campaigning for public office, said the archbishop of Manila.

Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales made the statement in a pastoral letter signed with 15 other bishops under his pastoral jurisdiction. The letter was released March 13 ahead of the country's May 10 presidential, congressional and local elections.

The letter encouraged people to freely choose leaders who would be accountable and serve the common good.

"Excessive campaign expenses in the past did not augur good and responsive governance," it said.

Free election means that there should be no physical coercion and no use of threats or money to influence or buy votes, the letter said.

According to the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, candidates already spent more than two billion pesos (\$43,763,000) on political advertisements, making the 2010 elections represent the biggest advertising expenditure in Philippine history.

Corruption and poverty are the two biggest issues that are devastating the country because "as corruption increases, poverty worsens," the pastoral letter said.

The worthiness of the candidates should be based on whether they believe in God, live a moral life, are free from vices, and respect life, it said. It added that government leaders should be concerned about the poor and the environment, and not about the pursuit of self-interests during election campaigns.

The letter urged people to pray for a peaceful vote and "a unified people before, during and after the election."

Meanwhile, Bishops Martin Jumoad of Isabela, Carlito Cenzon of Baguio and

Dinualdo Gutierrez of Marbel said in a statement March 17 that they would not accept any donations from politicians who were running in the upcoming elections. The statement was made as the church prepared for Alay Kapwa, a fundraising campaign program during the Lenten season to help the needy and the poor.

It's not proper for the church to accept financial donations from political candidates at the height of the campaign period, said Bishop Jumoad.

If politicians are sincere about the church's Alay Kapwa program, he said, they should donate their money to charitable institutions to "give help directly to those who are needy."