

Integrity Initiative needs more government support

by **Katherine Visconti**

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INTEGRITY FORUM. Companies met to speak about how to communicate their commitment to integrity at a July 4 forum hosted by the Makati Business Club (MBC), European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines and the Management Association of the Philippines.

MANILA, Philippines - President Aquino has been praised for his anti-corruption drive but businessmen want the government to throw more support behind the Integrity Initiative - a drive to institute clean standards in business.

Makati Business Club (MBC) Executive Director Peter Angelo Perfecto believes more companies will sign the integrity pledge if government shows more concrete support for the initiative. The goal for 2011 was 1,000 signatories and the goal for 2012 is 2,000. Yet as of July 4, only 1,064 businesses have signed.

"By this year end we hope to double the number again but it's moving quite slow. Apparently a concern of many corporations is okay, we'd like to be a part of this but do we have government on board? Meaning will they help with the problems with BIR? Will they help with the problems in securing permits? That's their concern," he said.

At a July 4 forum, a businessman who had signed the pledge and wished to remain anonymous complained that while senior officials are upright, lower level employees at the Bureau of Internal Revenue still ask for kickbacks.

Perfecto said, "We know it's been a continuing concern.... That's one of the reasons I think why we have hit a snag and that is why we are continuously engaging BIR and Bureau Customs and trying to find ways forward."

He suggested the government give signatories incentives, like fast-track lanes or "integrity lanes" to offer "a quicker, easier time clearing customs and paying taxes."

So far more than 20 state agencies have signed on and those behind the integrity initiative hope President Aquino will speak at their annual summit for the second year in a row.

But businessmen at the forum pressed for an immediate solution to corruption. Key note speaker and Rappler CEO Maria Ressa told them - expose it and we will help you.



TAKE ACTION. Maria Ressa, who known for her zero tolerance approach to corruption, urged firms to shine a light on bad business practices in the Philippines.

"We're not corrupt. We'll do the story. Have media shine the light," said Rappler's news head.

She told them that if they spoke up, they could create a snowball effect. "I think you gain strength in numbers... I would suggest you come together to take a position."

"Filipinos have the mistaken notion that we shouldn't say we are corrupt. But the reality is that corruption is endemic and we have to do something about it," said Ressa. - **Rappler.com**

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