



P-Noy hails business group for integrity initiative

By [Aurea Calica](#) | Updated September 15, 2011 - 12:00am

President Aquino lauded the goals of the 1st Integrity Summit held at the Marriott Hotel Manila, foremost of which is to create fair and competitive market conditions in the country. Joining him at the summit yesterday were Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr., businessman Ramon del Rosario, Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima, Chief Justice Renato Corona as well as local and global corporate leaders and anti-corruption experts.

MANILA, Philippines - President Aquino hailed private business groups yesterday for their Integrity Initiative project and urged them to continue helping the government fight graft and corruption.

“Let me remind you that our collective desire to instill integrity into our respective communities does not end with a pledge of integrity. We are now obliged to live up to this pledge,” Aquino told participants of the 1st Philippine Integrity Summit in Pasay City.

He said he is confident the business groups will take their unified code of conduct “extremely seriously,” adding “I know how hard it is, sometimes, to uphold these standards.”

“There are times when it must seem impossible to navigate your way through the bureaucracy without being tempted to take a shortcut or to offer a bribe,” Aquino said.

“A simple example is paying taxes. It can be so tempting to pay the collector a fraction of what you owe in taxes instead of the proper amount. Since we assumed office, we have worked on improving our tax administration efforts, and one of the things we have done is run after tax evaders, smugglers and corrupt government officials,” he said.

The President said that since July of last year, a total of 61 tax evasion and 43 smuggling cases have been filed with claims totaling around P26 billion and P54 billion, respectively.

“As we continue to monitor these cases, I am happy to report that our campaign against tax evaders and smugglers is paying off. From January to July this year, revenues collected already increased by 13.47 percent year-on-year,” Aquino said.

The President said much money had been lost over the years that could have gone to social services, infrastructure, debt reduction or national defense.

“In the past, perhaps you could have justified not paying taxes by saying it would have been used to fatten the wallets of corrupt officials. But as we strive to show you that that is no longer the case, I hope we can urge our fellow citizens to pay their share of taxes,” Aquino said.

“As we continue fixing what is wrong with government, I urge you to stand alongside us and do your part. This will not be easy, but if we work on it—if we choose not to shirk our responsibilities as individuals—then everybody will get the message and act fast and accordingly,” the President said.

Aquino said he was happy with the private sector’s efforts to promote integrity in business as this was a battle cry in his campaign.

“And for the past 15 months, we have taken that battle cry to heart—working to foster a culture of integrity in government. In this regard, I am proud to announce that we have made some progress,” he said.

Integrity pays

“Taking part in the Integrity Initiative cannot be measured immediately in pesos and centavos, but its benefits will eventually redound to everyone. For example, it is said that companies who engage in Corporate Social Responsibility, who have track records for integrity and competence, and who abide by the highest standards are valued at a premium in the stock market,” Aquino said.

“Companies who have a reputation for running their businesses in a clean and efficient manner enjoy the confidence of investors, debtors, and other stakeholders as opposed to those who run questionable operations,” he added. “To put it simply: by doing your part as responsible corporations, everybody wins—and by everybody I mean not just you as corporate workers, but you as taxpayers, as family men and women, and as citizens of this country,” he pointed out.

He said his own commitment to integrity is reflected in his appointment of officials with impeccable reputation like Justice Secretary Leila de Lima, Chairman Grace Tan and Commissioner Heidi Mendoza to the Commission on Audit and former Supreme Court justice Conchita Carpio-Morales as ombudsman.

He said integrity is even factored in in the budgeting process to make sure no taxpayers’ money is wasted.

“Efficient spending has allowed us to allocate a larger chunk of the budget to social services and defense—two sectors that have, for so long, lacked sufficient resources,” Aquino said.

The Department of Budget and Management, the President said, is also fostering the culture of transparency by including provisions in the national budget mandating all departments and agencies to publish important budget information as well as finance and performance indicators on their respective websites.

He said the Department of the Interior and Local Government is also requiring all local government units to disclose, on local bulletin boards, newspapers, and websites, how they spend their funds.

“We have also been trying to enjoin the citizenry to take a more active role in governance. This year, we had six national government agencies and three government corporations start a consultative budget preparation process, allowing us to engage civil society organizations in preparing the 2012 national budget,” he said. “We also created a layman’s version of the 2011 national budget so that more people can understand how the government is spending their money.”

The President said the Department of Finance has launched a website called Pera ng Bayan, through which common citizens may file anonymous reports or leads on possible tax evasion, government collusion, or smuggling operations.

“All of these we have done to promote integrity... But instilling a culture of integrity in government is only one aspect of the equation. We must also foster the same culture in the private sector, and this is why what you are doing today is most important,” he said.

The Makati Business Club and the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines said they expect to have more than 1,000 companies join the project before the end of the year.

Currently, about 700 companies from across all industries in the country have signed a pledge of commitment to integrity along with 13 Cabinet secretaries, Bureau of Customs, Bureau of Internal Revenue and Supreme Court.

Integrity Initiative vice chairman and ECCP president Hubert d’ Aboville said “a growing number of companies operating in the Philippines now want to eradicate any form of corruption in their respective businesses.”

He said it is their objective to create fair market conditions in the Philippines by leveling the playing field for business and investments.

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