

Column for Manila Bulletin, 20 March 2011
Senator Edgardo J. Angara

Reclaiming our integrity

The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) has selected Manila to host its next biennial conference in a clear vote of confidence for our efforts to overcome corruption especially in the public sector.

A total of 241 members of parliament from 46 countries – including myself as the only Philippine representative – came together in Mexico City last weekend for the GOPAC's 4th global conference. The Mexico declaration reiterated GOPAC's commitment to combat corruption through all democratic means possible.

The Philippines was chosen to host the conference in February 2013 not because we are perceived to be one of the most highly corrupt countries in Asia. Of course, we do not deny that corruption exists here. On the contrary, we are painfully aware that it does and that it will continue to erode our capacity to eradicate poverty if we do not act to abate it.

It is our frank appraisal of the pervasiveness of corruption in our society that drives us to fight corrupt and fraudulent practices – and the reason why our country was picked to organize the GOPAC conference in 2013.

We are at a crossroads as a nation. The Philippines was once one of the admired economies of Asia, a pioneer of democracy and market-oriented policies in this region. Unfortunately, high economic growth has come in spurts and bursts, almost never sustained enough to bring about long-term progress. Many of our neighbors that used to be less developed than us have overtaken us in the last two decades in terms of both economic wealth and social welfare.

Numerous studies have extensively documented that corruption is a major hindrance to the Philippines' progress. Countless political leaders have vowed to stamp out corruption once and for all. We know more words have been said than action done.

The Aquino administration is distinct because it was put in power on an overwhelming wave of hope that good governance will be restored and genuine reform initiated. Our people's trust in the administration's moral uprightness is high, and their expectations of reform equally so, if not even higher.

In 2013, over 500 parliamentarians from 50 countries will attend the GOPAC anti-corruption summit, which will be jointly organized by the Philippine Senate and the Southeast Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption (SEAPAC). This will put the Philippines in the spotlight – not for the magnitude of corruption in our public and private institutions, but for the campaign we wage to cleanse our government and society.

There are some bad perceptions about our country, but we also have made inroads in reducing corruption which we can proudly show the world. For instance, some of the laws I have authored aim to minimize the opportunity for corruption in government purchases (Government E-Procurement Law) and give teeth to efforts to prosecute dishonest public officials (creation of the Office of the Ombudsman). I am also pushing for the passage of the Political Party and Campaign Finance Reform bill to institutionalize transparency in the political party system.

This administration can undertake wider and deeper reforms between now and 2013 – coincidentally an election year – to demonstrate to the world that it is serious about fulfilling its promises to the Filipino people. We must seize this opportunity to reverse perceptions that have haunted our nation for so long.

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Column for Manila Bulletin, 13 March 2011
Senator Edgardo J. Angara

Stamping out corruption

Corruption is a social malady whose ramifications radiate from the highest echelons of power down to the smallest household. Its pervasiveness is, perhaps, its most lethal quality. Hence, any effort to contain corruption requires broad and constant engagement from all sectors of society.

This is one of the key points taken up during the 4th Global Conference of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) which I attended here in Mexico City this weekend.

GOPAC's first monitoring report emphasizes that having engaged members is primordial in achieving a global plan to combat corruption. This will begin with informed parliamentarians who have the political will to become genuine advocates of both global and national anti-corruption efforts.

The underlying basis for the global fight against corruption is no less than the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), the first legally binding instrument of its kind.

The Philippine Senate ratified the UNCAC back in November 2006, which made us the second Southeast Asian country to have done so. As member of the GOPAC's executive board, I was able to help craft some of the language of the UNCAC.

Moreover, we established the Southeast Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption (SEAPAC) in 2005. As a regional chapter, SEAPAC supports the GOPAC's goals of curbing corruption, promoting good governance and fostering accountability.

However, GOPAC's evaluation shows that much remains to be done toward forming a global plan that would strengthen parliamentary performance in abating corruption and ensuring that the implementation of the UNCAC remains the priority of all countries that signed the convention.

While the foundations have been established, support for the implementation, oversight and review of the UNCAC in the parliamentary level is still lacking in many countries.

GOPAC, therefore, proposes that strong country chapters should be created to stimulate political and civil cooperation. The coalition is committed to involving the widest group of stakeholders in planning, enforcing and evaluating anti-corruption measures – government agencies, civil society groups, international agencies, donors, media practitioners, academics, students and non-governmental organizations.

GOPAC stressed that citizens' participation is extremely important. Vigilance will not only deter corruption, but also reshape values that have been tainted by it.

At the same time, the credibility that the public vests in parliamentarians is crucial in lending credence to anti-corruption efforts. GOPAC's review indicates that based on the public's perspective, the integrity of legislators can weaken or strengthen the campaign itself.

Seven bills seeking to strengthen anti-plunder and anti-graft practices have been filed in our Congress so far. Additionally, we must strive to boost the oversight of anti-money laundering activities, which is critical in tracking, recovering and preventing the movement of illicit assets.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2010 shows that the Philippines is one of the most ill-perceived nations with regard to fraudulence. With a score of 2.4, we are among three-fourths of the 178 countries surveyed that gained a mark below five, on a scale of one (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean).

Perception is truly one of the biggest battles we face. But it is not only what foreign observers think of us. More importantly, it is how we, Filipinos, see ourselves and our country.

GOPAC and SEAPAC provide us with the tools and capacity to stamp out corruption. But they need continuous support from the highest echelons of power down to the smallest household to truly make a difference.

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PRESS RELEASE
14 March 2011

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MANILA VOTED AS GLOBAL ANTI-CORRUPTION SUMMIT HOST

Mexico City – The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) has chosen Manila as the venue of its next global conference in February 2013.

The Philippine Senate and the Southeast Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption (SEAPAC) will jointly host this biennial global gathering, which will be attended by over 500 members of parliament from 50 countries worldwide.

Manila was chosen as a venue in line with the Aquino administration's current flagship program of anti-corruption.

GOPAC is the only parliamentary network with the singular focus on combating corruption. There are currently over 900 members of GOPAC, representing over 90 countries in all the regions of the world.

Senator Edgardo J. Angara, the only Asian representative to GOPAC and founding president of SEAPAC, was elected vice president of GOPAC. Dr. Nasser Al Sane of Kuwait was re-elected president.

Angara was the driving force behind the establishment of SEAPAC in 2005 and is a member of the Executive Board of the Ottawa, Canada-based GOPAC.

"Achieving good governance and fighting corruption can be strengthened by building networks among institutions. International cooperation is a key ingredient. Just as corruption transcends borders, so too must we fight it on a transnational level," he said.

In the Philippines, Angara led the passage of major anti-corruption laws including the Government E-Procurement Law and creation of the Office of the Ombudsman. He continues to push for the Political Party and Campaign Finance Reform bill which will transform political parties into public institutions and maintain transparency in their activities. (30)

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ANGARA REPRESENTS RP IN GLOBAL ANTI-CORRUPTION MEET

Mexico City – Senator Edgardo J. Angara joins more than 150 members of Parliament from 47 countries all over the world who are gathered in Mexico City to affirm their commitment to the global fight against corruption.

“Corruption is a social malady whose ramifications radiate from the highest echelons of power down to the smallest departments. Its pervasiveness is, perhaps, its most lethal quality. Hence, any effort to contain corruption requires broad and constant engagement from governments of all countries, as well as all sectors of society,” he said.

The 4th Global Conference of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) is jointly hosted by the Senate of Mexico and GOPAC, the only parliamentary network with the singular focus on combating corruption. There are currently over 900 members of GOPAC, representing over 90 countries in all the regions of the world.

The organization’s next biennial conference will be held in Manila in 2013.

Angara was the driving force behind the establishment of the South East Asia Parliamentarians Against Corruption (SEAPAC) and is a member of the Executive Board of the Ottawa, Canada-based GOPAC. Angara is the only Asian representative to GOPAC.

The underlying basis for GOPAC’s fight against corruption is no less than the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), the first legally binding instrument of its kind.

The Philippine Senate ratified the UNCAC back in November 2006, which made it the second Southeast Asian country to have done so. As member of the GOPAC’s executive board, Angara was able to help craft some of the language of the UNCAC. To date, all SEAPAC member-countries have ratified the UNCAC.

On Saturday, Angara chaired the session on country chapter development which, he said, is “key to achieving results and pushing forward with GOPAC’s agenda.”

“GOPAC has done much, but can achieve more through effective, working country and regional chapters. The world is changing at a pace we hadn’t imagined possible. GOPAC’s success as a whole will depend on how quickly and skilfully we respond to

the anti-corruption challenges confronting each of our countries and our regions,” he added.

In the Philippines, Angara led the passage of major anti-corruption laws including the Government E-Procurement Law and creation of the Office of the Ombudsman. He continues to push for the Political Party and Campaign Finance Reform bill which will transform political parties into public institutions and maintain transparency in their activities. (30)