

Speech of His Excellency Benigno S. Aquino III

President of the Philippines

At the 2nd State Conference on the United Nations Convention Against Corruption

[Delivered in Malacañan Palace on December 2, 2014]

Sabi po ni Executive Secretary, “Pinakahihintay.” Hindi ko ho alam kung pagkatapos ko kainan na [laughter] or “sa wakas natapos na rin.” Ang problema po ng pinakahuling nagsalita—buti na lang ang sinundan ko magaling din eh. So, problema ho baka makumpara tayo sa kanila at baka sabihin, “Ano kaya ang nangyari at mukhang wala sa tiyempo ang ating Pangulo itong araw na ito?”

Pero bago natin makalimutan: [Secretary] Butch, I hope you took note of budgetary requirements of the Judiciary that should be attended to posthaste, [laughter] and since the approving authority is present also, perhaps we can lobby them for the speedy inclusion of what is necessary to help the Judiciary in our common fight against corruption amongst others, [applause] making sure we are compliant with all the directives.

When I was a Senator, I was rather notorious for my scrutiny and persistence during budget deliberations. This was because I believed then, as I do now, that for government to focus on its reason for being and serve the people, it must have the wherewithal to do so. That wherewithal is embodied in our national budget. And if funds are lost due to leaks or holes in our systems; if funds are wasted because of corruption, then the Filipino people will be deprived of the benefits they are entitled to in the present, and also deprived of a better future.

When we embarked on the straight path, we knew that each step we took had to be methodical; each hindrance would have to be dismantled before we could make true progress. As you may remember, the first Executive Order I signed created a Truth Commission intended to investigate allegations of graft and corruption, as the first step towards accountability. We all know unfortunately, this was blocked by the Supreme Court, which was then led by then-Chief Justice Corona. Yet we persisted. Anomalous projects were cancelled; government owned and controlled corporations that were once the cash cows of a corrupt few underwent reforms. We likewise turned our attention to budget and procurement, which was significant in light of the situation we came across. Only 6.5 percent of the 2010 budget, amounting to P100 billion, was left when this administration took office. We also inherited the proposed 2011 budget, which has to be given to Congress roughly about two months into office. Even with these challenges, we embarked on serious reforms. Bidding and procurement processes were tightened to minimize opportunities for corruption. Zero-Based Budgeting helped us put an end to programs that were inefficient, wasteful, or easily manipulated by the corrupt. And in 2012, we finally had the wherewithal

to craft a budget, under which each peso government spent would have real and concrete benefits for the Filipino people.

The first review cycle for the Philippines' compliance with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption covers that crucial period: the transition from the final years of my predecessor's term to our time in office, in which we undertook all these reforms and many more. As validated by both Egypt and Bangladesh, our peer review partners, the results of the first review cycle are indeed positive: we complied with 55 out of the 66 provisions of Criminalization and Law Enforcement, and 48 out of 54 provisions of International Cooperation. These are encouraging figures, of course; but this review is just a summary of what has taken place over five years. By its very nature, the review will not show the whole picture, whether of our efforts in criminalization, law enforcement, and international cooperation, or our administration's entire, multifaceted fight against corruption.

I already spoke of some of these initiatives during last year's conference: the websites through which our countrymen can better understand the budget and the budgeting process, and also report corrupt practices of officials, are still active and online for everyone's use. Since we last met, our administration has filed an additional 159 cases against smugglers, tax evaders, and erring government officials through the Run After the Smugglers, Run After Tax Evaders, and Revenue Integrity Protection Service programs. Prominent lawmakers, former heads of GOCCs and government agencies, and others in the private sector who conspired to steal from the people through the Priority Development Assistance Fund have been arrested and are now undergoing the appropriate processes to determine accountability. We should emphasize: these are only the initial cases filed; more will come once the necessary evidence is assembled.

There are new measures to speak of as well. For instance, one of the innovations we introduced in the budgeting process this year is the GAA-as-release-document system. Through this system, the budget serves as the release document itself the moment it is signed into law. This meant that, as soon as 2014 began, the majority of allocations were released to agencies, enabling them to begin implementing projects, thus cascading benefits down to our people, at the soonest possible time.

We must also not forget our efforts to empower the Filipino people, which have been intensified as a result of these good governance reforms. Massive investments into social services, health, and education continue, with 37 percent of the proposed 2015 budget allocated for social services. We were able to do this—and we remind everybody—without raising taxes, except for [sin tax reform](#), which is directly geared towards improving the overall health of the Filipino people. Perhaps, we should emphasize that again: without further burdening our people, just doing what is right, we have been empowering them. The Conditional Cash Transfer Program has grown by massive leaps and bounds: from around 800,000 beneficiary households when we took office to more than four million household beneficiaries today. And it has now been expanded to include families with children up to 18 years of age. Critical backlogs in classrooms, textbooks, and school seats have been ended through the hard work of our Department of Education and its partners.

Indeed: so much progress has been made in our drive to weed out corruption in government, and in so doing, better our capacity to serve the people. But as everyone here knows, especially those in public service, we must always remember: numbers and targets will only get us so far. The end of the UNCAC review cycle does not mean that we have accomplished what we have set out to do. As public servants, our goals must expand and evolve with the passage of time; we must always seek to build on the achievements of the past and the present.

Events like this remind us of our responsibilities, and give us the chance to renew our commitment to each other, as colleagues in government, and to the wider society. Let me say: it is encouraging to see that you have not grown weary of your jobs. In fact, it seems as if you are only asking for even more work, [laughter] since one of today's resolutions is the request for an executive order institutionalizing an Integrity Management Program throughout all levels of government, with the UNCAC as a guide. Rest assured: I will only be too happy to give you more to do, if it means we are able to achieve our goals sooner rather than later. [Applause] If I remember correctly the Executive Secretary, in his quest for more efficiency, gave this particular document for me to sign early last night. [Laughter] So the request has already been done. [Applause]

More is at stake here than just the implementation of a single project, or the attainment of 100 percent compliance with UNCAC. With the 2016 elections not too far off, let us always remember that we are working to make change permanent, to make the commitment to good governance a commitment that lasts beyond this administration. We are working to rid the Philippines of the corruption that has tainted its reputation and plagued it for so long; we are working to institutionalize a legacy that finds its roots in the mindset of our countrymen, who will never again settle for anything less than true public service.

Thank you. Good day.

<http://www.gov.ph/2014/12/02/speech-of-president-aquino-at-the-2nd-state-conference-on-the-uncac/>