

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY BENIGNO S. AQUINO III**  
**PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES**  
**(As read by Justice Secretary Leila M. de Lima)**

For the past four and a half years, my administration has been living out the pledge that carried us from the campaign into office: Kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap. Where there is no corruption, there is no poverty. As a result of this pledge: an inefficient and biased Ombudsman and a dishonest Chief Justice were impeached; my predecessor is under hospital arrest; and lawmakers, government officials and private citizens with alleged involvement in the large-scale theft of the national coffers are in detention, undergoing processes to determine their accountability.

Ensuring accountability remains of paramount importance to our administration. In the years before we took office, apathy had set in; one story of corruption replaced another in the headlines, with no justice to be found. We sought to bring back that belief in justice; we want to ensure that those who break the law, regardless of their social or economic stature, are held to account for wrongdoing. We want to ensure that those who follow the rules and work hard receive what is due them. By doing this, we show that the system works, we guarantee the predictability of outcomes. By doing this, we show that the playing field is level for all.

As such, while we have continued to target the big fish, we have also cast a wider net to go after all those other people who seek to take advantage of our countrymen. Competition policy is one of the ways we are protecting the interests of our countrymen, or, to be more specific, protecting their rights as consumers.

Honest competition in the market ensures that companies continue to seek ways to improve on their products and services in order to gain an edge over their competitors. The playing field can only be considered truly level when a company's share of the market is determined primarily by their ability to innovate and by their drive to provide the best quality services and products, at the right price. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

This is where men and women like you, and conferences like this one, come in. Your job is to ensure that the playing field is level and fair; that you are able to investigate and put an end to the different ways that a selfish few are able to unfairly stack the odds in their favor. This has real repercussions on Filipinos: from

frustrations regarding internet service providers, to charges on ATM withdrawals, to the fluctuations of household expenditures due to anomalous spikes in the price of certain vegetables. No sector should escape our notice

This is precisely why we created the Department of Justice-Office for Competition back in 2011. Despite having existed for only three years, the Office for Competition has already taken on the full weight of this responsibility. They have received 31 cases, at latest count, with 12 of them already resolved, and the remaining 19 still undergoing the necessary investigative processes, and I am hopeful that you can redouble your efforts and resolve them at the soonest possible time. As a direct service, they have also released advisory opinions and public statements urging companies in different sectors to adjust their practices, for instance, on misleading advertisements on promotional airfare rates, and on the expiry of gift checks. These things are cogs in the mechanism that is our national economy, but, just like any other issue, they have a real and direct impact on Filipinos who understandably want the most value for their money. In fact, you might be interested to know that one of the most popular and most shared infographic on our Official Gazette ([www.gov.ph](http://www.gov.ph)) is the Air Passengers Bill of Rights.

To give you another example that covers the opposite end of the spectrum: the Office for Competition was also responsible for investigating the staggering 74 percent increase in the price of garlic in the Philippines, from June 2013 to June 2014. The Office discovered that the drastic increase in price could not be attributed to a shortage in supply; rather, a single group was on the receiving end of import permits, allowing them to corner supply and dictate the price of garlic. This initial report has also allowed us to look into more anomalous transactions. In light of their findings, I have directed the Department of Justice to develop the case against the cartel responsible, and we can look forward to charges being filed sooner rather than later.

These are the kinds of crooked practices and systems we want to abolish, the kinds of persons that we want to catch and hold accountable for taking advantage of decent, hardworking Filipinos. Situations like this threaten to delay the achievement of our shared goal of inclusive growth: where honest business redounds to great benefit for all, and where each of our countrymen is an empowered consumer in the truest sense of the word, not only through improved spending power, but also and more importantly, through the confidence that they are getting their money's worth.

It is true that we have already achieved so much together, but, as I have said time and again, public service is not a profession in which we can be content with any level of achievement. There is always more to be done, and more to be asked of each of us. It is my hope that you keep this in mind throughout the duration of the conference. Participate in the discussions, share your knowledge, and listen to each other. The lessons you learn today may help to refine legislation, or contribute to the National Competitiveness Council's efforts in drafting the country's Game plan for Competitiveness. Most importantly, they will help you to perform your everyday duties with a renewed vigor, as you remain confident that each and every task you accomplish is a welcome help to our countrymen.

Thank you, and good day.