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# Int'l solons from 67 nations vow to enact laws vs graft

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[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#)

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MANILA, Philippines—Hundreds of lawmakers from 67 countries on Saturday signed in Manila a binding declaration to enact laws against graft, particularly for the recovery of ill-gotten wealth, and to enable the international community to prosecute

the corrupt.

The delegates to the 5th Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (Gopac) signed the declaration just as the Philippine government prepared to enforce a new law recognizing victims of human rights abuses during the martial rule of Ferdinand Marcos and compensating them from a \$246 million, roughly P10 billion, fund coming from wealth recovered from the dictator's Swiss bank accounts.

Gopac officials, in their personal pronouncements, also acknowledged that many parliamentarians are involved in corruption.

Gopac's Manila Declaration acknowledged that individual states and the international community should have the mandate and the means to bring the corrupt to justice and recognized the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, signed in 2005, as the first legally binding and internationally accepted anticorruption instrument.

The lawmakers resolved, among other things, to establish and enforce codes of ethics and conduct within their ranks; work for the institutionalization of anticorruption measures, particularly on the recovery and restitution of assets stolen from populations; and seek the widespread adoption of laws that will obligate states to cooperate with the international community for the prosecution of the corrupt.

“Now, this is not easy. The people who have stashed the millions and the billion parts of the world so that they are rich beyond measure are going to push back,

Canadian lawmaker and Gopac's chief executive officer, said at a news conference.

"The world is starting to move and that is the great news of the day—that the world is starting to engage in the fight against corruption, that we are going to stop them. Be it through electronic means and electronic surveillance, be it through passage of legislation, be it through other means of oversight and accountability... we are going to be a force to do it," Williams said.

### **Resolutions**

In a statement, Sen. Edgardo Angara reported that the participants in the four-day conference agreed on several resolutions, including enhancing the capacity of parliamentarians to adapt international standards to national needs, strengthening anticorruption strategies and monitoring their respective countries' compliance with the UN convention against corruption.

"Gopac members agree that corruption is a plague that affects individuals at the local level and that this plague can have serious consequences globally," said Angara, the newly elected chair of Gopac and one of the prime movers in bringing the anticorruption conference to Manila.

"As legislators, we cannot remain idle. We must be part of the solution, even while there are those among parliamentarians who have been party to corruption," Angara said.

### **Destroys economies**

Nasser Al Sane, a member of the Kuwaiti parliament and Gopac's outgoing chair, said during the opening of the conference that the World Bank estimated in 2011 that countries lose more than \$1.3 trillion to corruption annually.

"No one can measure corruption exactly because it's under the table. There's no paper work to justify it. And therefore it may be [worth] \$1.3 trillion, it may be \$1.4 trillion, it may be \$1.5 trillion. But we do know that it destroys economies," Williams told reporters.

"We do know that people are destitute because of corruption. We do know that governments have the capacity to change that if they so desire... [Now] what are you going to do about it? Having the best practices on paper is important but not as how you are going to implement these," Williams said.

### **Corrupt lawmakers**

"Some parliamentarians we know are corrupt, that's why parliamentarians have a bad name," Williams said. He said Gopac is made up of lawmakers that believe "this must change."

Angara said corruption is largely measured by perception because corruption is based on people's experience.

"It is a gut issue for many. Eliminating corruption, therefore, necessitates changing experiences, changing how people experience governance," Angara said.

The Gopac agreement, Angara said, urges parliamentarians "to participate in anticorruption meetings on the international stage and work with international organizations and civil society on anticorruption initiatives."

### **Oversight**



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Angara said the parliamentarians also agreed to help build the capacity of fellow legislators to exercise anticorruption oversight in their countries by developing support networks for lawmakers and to strengthen relations with organizations that work on oversight issues.

“One important resolution we all agreed upon is to help each other develop and roll out resources to strengthen antimoney-laundering regimes,” Angara said.

“We must do all we can to aid the efforts of our fellow parliamentarians to recover stolen corrupt assets through domestic legislation and initiatives,” he said.

Angara said the parliamentarians also pledged to allow the public and civil society to participate in the fight against graft and corruption by providing education and access to information, as well as protecting the rights of anticorruption advocates.

### Ethics and conduct

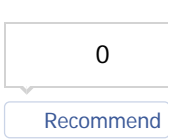
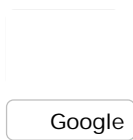
He said the delegates also resolved to disseminate and implement recommendations for the development of effective and comprehensive systems of ethics and conduct at global, regional and domestic levels.

“They also agreed to uphold fundamental international standards while recognizing the differences in political and cultural contexts in which legislators work,” Angara said.

He said Gopac’s Global Task Force for Women in Parliamentary Work agreed to provide a network of support for women parliamentarians to enhance their capacity to participate in the fight against corruption.

“The task force also recognized studies showing a direct link between the presence of women in parliaments and a decrease in the level of corruption,” Angara said.

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