WITH Senator Franklin Drilon as Head of Delegation, Senators TG Guingona, Bongbong Marcos, Pia Cayetano, and I attended the 127th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly in Quebec, Canada, last week, on October 21 to 26.

The IPU adopted “Better Parliaments, Stronger Democracy” in October, 2011, as the guiding principle of its strategy from 2012 to 2017 – a vision shared by the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC).

GOPAC’s regional arm, the South East Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption (SEAPAC) and the Philippine Senate will host the 5th Global Conference on Anti-Corruption in Manila in January, 2013. The conference, themed “Good Laws. Good Leaders. Good Citizens,” is expected to draw 500 leaders from all over the world.

Senators Drilon, Guingona, and Marcos joined me in extending a personal invitation to the IPU participants to attend the GOPAC conference, widely considered as one of the largest anti-corruption events in the world.

Acemoglu and Robinson, in their seminal book “Why Nations Fail,” note that when people in power use economic and political institutions to benefit themselves over the rest of the country, they create a vicious cycle of “extractive institutions” that leads to the failure of the state. Curbing corruption is a key component to ensure long-term economic growth for our country and the ASEAN region.

It is imperative for policymakers to safeguard institutions from abuse. This is one of the objectives of the 5th Global Conference – to equip parliamentarians with the knowledge and tools to enact responsive and effective legislation. Among the topics to be covered are parliamentary oversight and the procurement process. Such reforms are indispensable to rebuilding our people’s trust in government – a step that the Aquino administration has taken with its outspoken stand against corruption.

Our fellow parliamentarians from the Asia Pacific, the Middle East, Latin America, African countries, and the Caribbean responded positively to this invitation, citing it as “timely and meaningful.” They commended our country’s collective effort to facilitate reform in all branches of government. We look forward to their participation in this global effort.

This is made even more urgent as we prepare for regional economic integration in 2015. While
the Philippines jumped 10 places to 65th in the Global Competitiveness Index, we remain behind our ASEAN neighbors, with the exception of Vietnam and Cambodia. One main cause is weak infrastructure – the result of longstanding corruption. While ASEAN 2015 will give us greater access to education, employment, and commercial opportunities, it will also require us to boost the country’s competitiveness to bring us up to par with our neighbors.

Abuse and corrupt practices weigh us down and prevent us from realizing our full potential. This is something that both the IPU and GOPAC, along our current national government, recognize. I am optimistic that the dialogues we initiate, and the actions and policies resulting from them, will be our stepping stones to a place of prominence in the ASEAN neighborhood, and in the world.

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