



GOVERNMENT GRAFTBUSTERS. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo inducts newly appointed Presidential AntiGraft Commission (PAGC) officials Connie de Guzman (2nd from right), chairwoman, and Nicasio Conte (right), commissioner. Looking on are Toni Kwok (2nd from left), former deputy commissioner of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, and Ombudsman Simeon Marcelo (left). As PAGC officials, De Guzman and Conte are tasked to go after and prosecute corrupt public officials. (Melyn R. Acosta)

GMA visits Pagsanjan in a gesture of unity

Anti-corruption workshop

President Arroyo will soon organize an anti-corruption workshop among government officials with Hong Kong anti-corruption expert Tony Kwok as resource person.

Arroyo announced this during Kwok's courtesy call on the President yesterday.

The European Union (EU) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will sponsor the anti-corruption workshop. The date and venue are still being worked out.

In a news briefing in Malacañang, Kwok, who serves as the government's consultant in its anti-corruption drive, said the workshop would enable public servants to find ways "to clean their own houses."

"I came from Hong Kong carrying one important message: It can be done."

Kwok recalled that corruption was a way of life in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s. But the former British colony was transformed into "one of the 'cleanest' places on earth" shortly after the establishment of the Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption in 1974.

Kwok, who joined the commission in 1975, played a big role in the eradication of corruption in Hong Kong.

"From the Hong Kong experience, fighting corruption is not really an insurmountable problem, all you need is political will.

"And you have that (political will) in your President, you have that in your Ombudsman, and the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission."

Arroyo earlier bared a plan to make the Office of the Ombudsman like the powerful Hong Kong anti-corruption commission, which would investigate graft cases together with the PAGC.

Buoyed by the "can-do" approach of Kwok, the President immediately ordered the PAGC to prioritize the investigation of the top 20 graft complaints against undersecretaries and other high officials of government.

PAGC chairman Constancia de Guzman said this was the first directive of the President after she and PAGC commissioner Nicasio Conti were sworn into office yesterday in Malacañang.

The third PAGC member is Commissioner Teresita Baltazar.

Also on the orders of Arroyo, the PAGC would hire more investigators, instead of lawyers, to effectively scrutinize and build cases against crooked and dishonest public servants. The PAGC promised not to be used as a demolition tool for government officials.

The anti-corruption agency will establish a centralized system of investigation as one of the safeguards corruption in its ranks.

The system would track down each investigator handling a specific case, thus easily detecting any extortion activity by PAGC members.

PAGC, an attached agency of the Office of the President, is mandated to initiate investigations *motu proprio* on suspected corrupt officials in the executive branch. (Genalyn Kabiling)

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