

Aquino takes power, vows to end Philippines poverty
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Benigno Aquino was sworn in as president of the Philippines on Wednesday with a vow to lift his nation out of poverty and wipe out crippling corruption that he said thrived under his predecessor.

In a speech to a mass of supporters wearing his family's signature yellow, the 50-year-old bachelor promised to lead by example and not break the trust of the millions of Filipinos who delivered him a landslide election victory.

"Today marks the end of a regime indifferent to the appeals of the people," Aquino said in one of many stinging criticisms of Gloria Arroyo, whose nearly 10 years in power were marred by allegations of vote rigging and massive graft.

"Through good governance in the coming years we will lessen our problems. The destiny of the Filipino will return to its rightful place and, as each year passes, the Filipino's problems will continue to lessen."

Aquino said ending poverty by eradicating corruption would serve as the foundation of his administration.

"Our foremost duty is to lift the nation from poverty through honest and effective governance," he said.

Police estimated up to 500,000 people turned up at a seaside Manila park for Aquino's inauguration, and the event took on a festival-style atmosphere with a popular folk singer belting out songs of hope before the oath-taking.

The crowd roared and waved yellow flags as Aquino, wearing a traditional Filipino "barong" shirt, took his oath in front of a Supreme Court judge.

"I think he can reduce corruption and improve governance," high school teacher Terlito Malaya, 52, said as he waited for Aquino to be sworn in.

"Poverty is also a very big problem and needs a permanent solution... but no-one should think right now that he will fail."

One crucial factor in Aquino's election victory was his status as the son of democracy heroes Benigno and Corazon Aquino, who remain revered for their efforts to overthrow dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

His father and namesake was shot dead at Manila airport in 1983 as he returned from US exile to lead the democracy movement against Marcos.

The new president's mother took over from her martyred husband and led the "people power" revolution that overthrew Marcos in 1986, and earned a reputation as an incorruptible leader during six years as president.

"My parents sought for nothing less, died for nothing less, than democracy and peace," Aquino said.

"I am blessed by this legacy. I will carry the torch forward."

Aquino repeated his warning to Arroyo and her allies that he would investigate them for their alleged crimes while she was in office.

"To those who are talking about reconciliation... we have this to say: 'There can be no reconciliation without justice'," he said.

Aquino then referred to a Truth Commission he announced on Tuesday that would be set up to investigate and potentially prosecute Arroyo for alleged corruption, vote rigging and human rights abuses.

"Those who are guilty should face justice. We cannot continue with this practice where no-one is made to account and they will continue to abuse," Aquino said.

Part of Wednesday's events saw Aquino escort Arroyo in a limousine from the presidential palace to the Rizal Park venue for the oath-taking ceremony and transfer of power.

They shook hands and smiled for the press at the presidential palace, but Aquino avoided making eye contact in their awkward encounter.

The crowd voiced ironic cheers as Arroyo handed over power and departed the event before the inauguration took place.

East Timor President Jose Ramos-Horta and US Trade Representative Ron Kirk were among the foreign dignitaries to attend the ceremony.

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