

Philippines leader sets example, gets stuck in traffic
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New Philippine President Benigno Aquino may already be rueing his inaugural pledge to suffer Manila's congested roads alongside his compatriots, after his limousine got stuck in traffic on Friday.

On his second day in office Aquino ordered his driver to stop for red lights and declined to use lanes set aside for public buses and as a result arrived 40 minutes late for a military parade.

"He refused to go into the yellow (bus) lane. We got stuck in traffic," a journalist who was part of the official convoy from Aquino's northern Manila home, five kilometres (three miles) away, told AFP.

Police escorts were also barred from using their sirens, and members of his security detail jumped out of their vehicles to secure the presidential car every time the heavy mid-morning traffic stopped the limousine, he said.

Aquino, son of the late democracy icon and former leader Corazon Aquino won a landslide election victory in May on a pledge to fight corruption and end a culture of impunity enjoyed by many Filipinos in positions of power.

At his inaugural speech on Wednesday he brought the crowd of half a million people to their feet when he declared: "No sirens, no counter-flow (driving on the wrong lane), no bribes."

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda admitted on Thursday that Aquino's insistence that he be treated like every other Filipino in traffic was causing a massive headache for his bodyguards.

"That's a concern. Either he wakes up earlier and just observe all these traffic rules or, since he's allowed to use sirens, he can use the sirens," Lacierda said.

"I don't think anybody will fault him for using the sirens."

Under the law, only the president, the vice president, the heads of the two chambers of parliament, the Supreme Court chief justice, police, military and emergency vehicles can use sirens and drive through red lights.