

SPEECH BY
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AT THE 4TH REGIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE
PACIFIC AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR
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Dato' Zulkipli Mat Noor
Director-General Anti-Corruption Agency Of Malaysia

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. On behalf of the government and people of Malaysia, I would like to welcome all delegates and guests, especially those who have traveled from all parts of the Asia-pacific region to be here today. as a country that has always striven to uphold the principles of democracy, justice and integrity, Malaysia is honoured to host this year's regional anti- corruption conference for Asia and the pacific .

2. I would like to congratulate the A.D.B., O.E.C.D. and the anti-corruption agency of Malaysia, for jointly organising this important event - one that brings together politicians, officials, anti-corruption experts and leaders of civil society, in order to discuss, share and deliberate ways and means to effectively combat corruption in the Asia-pacific region, in the new millennium.

3. This conference is the fourth in a series of successful regional anti-corruption conferences, where many important milestones have been achieved. one such milestone is the endorsement of the regional anti- corruption action plan for Asia-pacific by 17 participating governments during the last conference in Tokyo in 2001. I am confident that this year's conference will continue to forge new approaches to strengthen our resolve to fight corruption and enhance integrity in all spheres of life. as an implementer, I am grateful that with such internationally endorsed strategies and action plans, we now have even more weapons in our arsenal with which to confront global and national corruption decisively.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Looking around this afternoon, I feel enormously encouraged that there are individuals and organisations all over the world that are sufficiently concerned about the debilitating effects of corruption on the human condition. It is people like yourselves who are making a positive difference to the lives of citizens in your country and throughout the world. I know I am preaching to the converted when I say that corruption, both grand and petty, is mankind's most deadly social disease which must be cured.

5. Efforts to combat corruption have never been and will never be easy. Indeed, it is easier to ignore it, to sweep it under the carpet, or to even benefit from it. But confront it we must, not just for the simple reason that corruption is morally wrong, but because corruption exacts a heavy toll on a nation's social, political and economic wellbeing.

6. At a fundamental level, corruption is damaging because decisions are driven by ulterior motives, with no concern for consequences on the wider community. Corrupt acts undermine good governance, fundamentally distort public policy, lead to the misallocation of resources, and harm the growth of the public and private sectors.

7. Corruption is also the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development. It undermines development by compromising the rule of law and weakening the institutional foundations upon which economic growth depends. If there is a perception that corruption in a country is dire, and the cost of doing business has therefore escalated, that country will find its foreign and domestic investors shying away from further investing and doing business in the country. In this instance, economic expansion is stalled, competitiveness drops, incomes fall, jobs are lost, and the people suffer.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. In order to combat corruption effectively, we can no longer afford quick, ad-hoc short-term solutions. Rather we must fight it comprehensively on all fronts, with a myriad of tools. The fight against corruption must necessarily begin with inculcating the right attitude and values in all of society, particularly among those who wield power.

10. Inculcating values, attitudes and behaviours based on the principles of integrity and justice is arguably the most important element in the fight against corruption. Values and attitudes are shaped by an individual's upbringing and his or her life experiences. In that sense, the fight against corruption is a long-term battle, and begins with the family unit. Knowingly or unknowingly, parents pass down their values to their children. It is, therefore, crucial that parents themselves lead an honest life based on principles of justice and integrity so that they can be an example for their children to follow.

11. Meanwhile, the education system, which shapes and moulds our youths, can also play a vital role in instilling good values. In this case, the Malaysian government will be reintroducing civics classes in the school curriculum for all students in the hope of instilling a lifetime of good values and ethical behaviour in our children.

12. However, merely appealing to a person's sense of right and wrong alone may not be sufficient to fight corruption. I believe that to be successful, we must always consider a systems-wide approach. Our actions, especially in the area of good governance and anti-corruption, should not only be aimed at instilling the right values and attitudes, but should go beyond that to strengthening processes, institutions, as well as punitive measures.

13. In Malaysia, we are continuously looking at ways and means to enhance the pillars of integrity in order to work towards a corruption-free society. Personally, I have always been a strong believer in the need to promote good governance. As many of you may be aware, in the past month I have vigorously pursued efforts to improve the public service delivery system to make it more efficient, transparent and accountable.

14. The benefits of an improved public service delivery system are wide-ranging, with positive effects on the economy through a reduction in the cost of doing business, through better allocation of resources, and through shorter time needed to complete a transaction. In enhancing the delivery of services, both big business and the man on the street can benefit. But equally, if not more important, a better functioning public service delivery system will promote integrity by reducing opportunities for corruption to occur. In short, by improving public service processes and procedures, loopholes and gaps in the system, which allow corruption to take place, can be eliminated.

15. Beyond this, sound institutions are critical in the fight against corruption. My experience as a politician and civil servant tells me that many of the problems associated with corruption have their origin in flawed or compromised institutions. It is out of this conviction that I recently announced that Malaysia would implement a national integrity plan, which is a comprehensive framework in which best practices, new mechanisms, committees and structures would be formalised and implemented to promote good governance, particularly within the public sector.

16. To ensure that institutional capacity building has a sound ethical foundation, the Malaysian government is also supporting the establishment of a national institute for public ethics, which will be the prime mover of the national integrity plan. This institute will coordinate and undertake research aimed at promoting good governance, accountability, transparency, and efficiency in the public service. At the same time it will also provide training, courses and opportunities for inter-agency discussions on ways to improve the quality of service and efficiency in both the public and private sectors.

17. What I have hitherto outlined are preventive measures in fighting corruption. if implemented effectively, I believe they can curb graft, reduce incidences of bribery and monitor potential abuses of power. yet without the deterrence provided by enforcement, these measures will not comprehensively eradicate corruption. we need to ensure that punitive actions are as effective as preventive measures. national anti-corruption agencies must be allowed to operate without fear or favour and empowered to investigate speedily and comprehensively. for some, values and principles are insufficient. only the fear of being caught and punished can stop them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. I believe that the fight against corruption has to be a national effort. members of the public must be educated about the evils of corruption and co-opted into the fight against this scourge. just as we clap with both hands, we need to acknowledge that it is not only the bribe taker, but the bribe giver that is at fault. my government's effort to eradicate corruption will come to naught if the public compromises the integrity of government by offering financial and other such inducements.

19. Not only must the public not offer bribes, they must be proactive in reporting instances of corruption. every citizen must be the eyes and ears of the government in detecting and exposing corruption. let those who partake in graft feel unsafe and insecure knowing that they are being watched. in this regard the government will ensure that there are easy and convenient channels provided to the public to report cases of corruption, and that protection be given to those who come forward to report cases.

Ladies and gentlemen,

20. With technological advancements in I.C.T., and greater cross-border movement of ideas, people and finance, national borders are increasingly more porous, and corruption too has taken a more international flavour. for example, the evidence of corrupt acts in one country can swiftly and neatly be hidden away in secret bank accounts in another country. this is but one example that points to the serious need for greater international cooperation to contain the spread of corruption. after all, we already have international cooperation in piracy, drugs, and transnational crime; it is only logical that we cooperate to stamp out corruption as well.

21. Recognising the need for greater investigative expertise and skills to clamp down on the rise of corruption, my government has recently approved a 17 million ringgit allocation for the creation an anti- corruption academy under the purview of our A.C.A.. it will be the first of its kind in the region, and we would like to offer the academy as a regional centre for anti-corruption capacity-building - promoting best practices in investigations, monitoring and enforcement, and in newer areas such as forensic accounting and forensic engineering. it is our sincere hope that countries around the region will support this effort by sending their representatives to the

academy to discuss, share, and learn from each other new methods and tools to fight corruption.

22. Malaysia remains committed to the cause of reducing and eradicating corruption, and we welcome any initiative that seeks to advance justice and integrity in all spheres of public life. To demonstrate our strong commitment, especially at the international level, I would like to announce that the Malaysian government will be signing the U.N. anti-corruption convention later this month in Mexico. The general areas that are covered by the convention include criminalisation of bribery; prevention of corruption and promotion of integrity; international cooperation, including in asset recovery and extradition; as well as cooperation in implementation of the convention itself.

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. I believe expectations for this conference are fairly high. This is necessarily so as much of our work will have a direct and indirect impact on the lives of so many people throughout the region. We can, and we must, do more to take on corruption in a clear and resolute manner.

24. I would like to wish all delegates and participants here a productive and successful conference. I hope this year's conference will result in greater understanding among all groups of the challenges that lie ahead, and of the need for greater collaboration in tackling the menace of corruption. On that note, it is my honour and privilege to officially declare the 4th regional anti-corruption conference for Asia and the Pacific open.

Thank you