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Gov't vows to intensify drive vs. graft, corruption

MANILA, Jan. 15 (PGON) - The Cabinet vowed today to wage an intensified campaign against graft and corruption to ensure that the benefits of the growing economy would trickle down to the people, especially the poor, unmarred by corrupt practices.

The Cabinet's decision to tighten the screws on corruption in the bureaucracy was reached during the National Security Council-National Anti-Poverty Commission-Cabinet Group (NSC-NAPC-CABG) meeting this morning at the Aguinaldo State Dining Room in Malacanang. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo presided over the meeting.

The joint meeting took up several proposals of the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC) to crack down on grafters, including the issuance of the implementing rules and regulations of Republic Act No. 9485 or the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007. President Arroyo signed RA 9485 last June 2.

The Act requires all government offices, including local government units and government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs) to expedite action on all transactions as well as upgrade their frontline services dealing with the public to avoid red tape.

RA 9485 also states that heads of government offices are accountable to the public in rendering fast, efficient, convenient and reliable services. It also requires agencies concerned to act on pending papers within five working days involving simple transactions, and a minimum of 10 days for complex cases. The number of signatories in any document is limited to a maximum of five.

One of the fiscal reforms initiated by the Arroyo administration, RA 9485 seeks to cut bureaucratic red tape, clean up transactions in the government and imposes stiff penalties on violators.

Another PAGC proposal taken up during the group meeting was the implementation of Executive Order (EO) No. 670 which seeks to amend EO 531 seeking to speed up the processing of cases of the PAGC by transforming the commission from a recommendatory to a quasi-judicial body.

Another proposal was to pilot the Anti-Corruption Scoreboard and call for the immediate passage of the Right to Information Act, Whistleblowers Act and House Bill 3003 that seek to compel the government to publish the income tax returns of all government officials, whether they are elected or appointed, in a move to lessen if not eradicate corruption.

With PAGC, the annual conviction rate of erring government personnel rose by almost 60 percent in 2007 from only six percent in 1987 when PAGC was created.

The number of cases against the so-called "big fish" charged before the Sandiganbayan also rose from 124 in 2004 to 336 in 2005 and 512 in 2006 or an 89 percent increase.

The President, in a move to rid the government of graft and corruption, has doubled the budget of the Ombudsman since 2002 to P974 million 2007. With the increased budget, the Ombudsman was able to hire about 50 new prosecutors and 200 investigators.

The commission said, however, that the fight against graft and corruption could not be accomplished by the government alone. For the anticorruption campaign to succeed, it needs the support and vigilance of the civil society, religious groups, the academe, the business community and even the international financial community.

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