

# **OPENING SPEECH OF CALD CHAIRMAN SAM RAINSY**

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Greetings!

There is this Asian folktale about a monkey and a goat. Their master who is a farmer, left a bowl of rice inside his hut but before leaving he commanded, "This rice is my supper. Do not eat it." After the farmer left, the goat fell asleep and the monkey ate the bowl of rice. After several hours, the monkey peeped from the window and saw the farmer approaching. Surreptitiously, he placed rice grains around the mouth of the goat. The farmer, tired and hungry, barged in and saw the empty bowl on his table. "Who ate my supper?!" he bellowed. The monkey with the acting skills of a great thespian—and the panache of a shrewd politician—raised his hands timidly but his eyes gazed towards the sleeping goat. The farmer, upon seeing rice grains dripping from the mouth of the goat, flared. He took his blade and slaughtered the goat. The monkey went out, the farmer presumed because it could not stand such gory sight. Back in the forest, the monkey gloated and jumped in joy.

Fables usually have a moral story. A cynic perhaps would draw the following conclusions: one, crime does pay and two, there is seldom justice in this world. Or perhaps, a valuable lesson in the context of corruption "You are innocent until you are caught."

But although such a folktale at first sight may appear as being totally devoid of a moral lesson—ironically the very essence of a fable, it does present some valuable truisms.

If anything else it underscores the importance of sound values, accountability of action, transparency of decision-making processes and wise counsel in leadership. If these principles were present, the goat would still be alive; the monkey banished to the wilderness where it belonged; and the farmer would probably have more harvest and livestock than what he ended

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up with—in this case, an empty bowl and a carcass of a murdered goat.

But what I would like to point out is that corruption is beyond statistics, case studies and academic research work. For more than counting dollars and cents the cost of corruption, we must hear the cries, smell the stench, view in full color the squalor and most painfully feel the suffering. We must see the human face of corruption, and more importantly, its effects. And what a tragic face it is: street children, beggars, prostituted women, a neglected citizenry, sickness and death brought about by dilapidated infrastructure and non-functioning public services, and so on and so forth *ad nauseam*. And even more tragic are those concealed beneath this face of corruption: the complete distortion of values, the total disregard for human dignity and the disintegration of the moral fibers of entire societies.

Countless activities and efforts have been conducted in order to fight corruption. I am quite sure that for majority of you, this is not the first time you would be attending an anti-corruption activity.

My colleagues in CALD agree that we have attended so many conferences, seminars and workshops on corruption. And some expressed their pessimism, if not exasperation. Oh no, not another anti-corruption activity! It is therefore important that the workshop becomes not just a mere academic exercise, or worse, a lip service just to show that we are doing something. As in any other workshop, the essence of the activity is its application. I do not wish to ignore the importance of theoretical frameworks and references, for indeed they are. But even the so-called best practices will be of no value unless they are precisely practiced and implemented with seriousness and political will and in significant magnitude and impact.

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A strong point of this workshop is the fact that we have excellent representations from ruling parties, opposition parties and members of either ruling or opposition coalitions. Aside from such a mix, you who are here are all integral in your respective organizations and you are in a position to effect intraorganizational reform particularly in the areas of leadership and candidate selection, ethical standards and evaluation, and financial management; and to help formulate a legislative agenda for reform. It heartens me to see such a congregation of people from diverse political persuasions in a spirit of unity and cooperation to address a serious problem plaguing our nations. We may be of different ideologies but we are one in our hopes and dreams for our people, our countries and the community of nations.

Admittedly, this project had raised eyebrows. Imagine, a workshop on how political parties can combat corruption. Detractors and critics may ask, “but aren’t political parties part of this corruption?” or “what would be the impetus for political parties to be part of an endeavor aimed towards reforming the political system if they benefit from such a system in the first place?” As a member of a party—especially a party that much to my consternation bears my name—it pains me to admit that yes this is true. These are valid doubts and questions that cannot be ignored.

But on the other hand, we cannot allow ourselves to be trapped in this “Catch-22” situation. Corruption is one of those chicken and egg dilemmas that are tough to crack. Is it possible for a party to reform even in a political context characterized by graft, oppression and persecution? Must an idealistic and principled party concentrate on being part of greater social reforms without being bothered by short-term concerns?

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The world is getting more and more complex. The world had long ceased to be viewed in black or white. It does not follow that if you are part of the problem, you should not be part of the solution. Yes, parties may contribute to corruption or at the very least, be unable to escape the system that it is part of but we do not have the luxury to remain apathetic and do nothing. Otherwise, we simply perish by default; we die by virtue of obsolescence.

I agree with the assertion of Ivan Doherty that much as civil society is important in any democracy, it cannot replace political parties. And for parties to be able to succeed in any advocacy—whether in anti-corruption or whatever endeavor—it must first and foremost, be strong, dynamic and accountable. In many developing countries, parties are either too weak on one extreme or too monolithic on the other, or too centered towards a strong personality without a concrete or serious platform to speak of, or too insignificant in a setting where the electorate are not even aware of their existence. Political parties are important but it is also up to political parties to make themselves relevant.

A corrupt society is like a sick person. Corruption is the tumor that destroys the human being. Political parties are both part of the organism and part of the tumor. We therefore cannot have the moral ascendancy to demand for social reforms in our governments and states unless we incise from our own organism (the political party) the cancerous tissues of patronage and fraud; this malignancy of guns, goons and gold used and abused all in the name of political power.

Change is possible. Change is necessary. And therefore, we must make reforms inevitable. Otherwise, why bother?

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Asia has gone a long way but it still has a lot of things to be done. In Asia, we have many of the oldest civilizations of the world. In Asia too are the biggest and oldest colonies of Western powers. In many cases, the transition from colonization to democracy was a tumultuous event characterized by long periods of home-grown tyranny.

Our organization, the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats has been cognizant of the most critical issues affecting the region and in our humble way, we have attempted to address some of these issues. In the 1998 CALD Conference in Bangkok which was during the height of the Asian economic crisis, we attempted to face head on the political dimensions of what was essentially seen as an economic problem.

In our 2000 Jakarta Conference, we recognized the trend of democratization that was sweeping the region and how shared experiences from nations in various levels of democratic developments could learn from one another. Just last November in Manila, CALD attempted to tackle the impact of globalization in the region and discuss appropriate political responses to the global challenge.

It was in the 1998 Bangkok Conference where CALD argued that the crisis could have been prevented or at least, its impact cushioned more effectively if there were sounder policies in place and had systems and practices of accountability and transparency been installed and implemented. Now also in Bangkok, but this time with a new partner, the National Democratic Institute, we would attempt to support political parties in their efforts to implement internal anti-corruption reforms through enhanced democracy, accountability, and transparency in party structures and practices.

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I view all these endeavors as part of a continuum of our democratic struggles towards our cherished and collective aspirations of freedom, prosperity, peace and justice. From Bangkok 1998 to Bangkok in 2002, these are but part of a dynamic, complex, unfinished and on-going process. "Democracy," as the President John Kennedy once said, "is never a final achievement. It is a call to an untiring effort." All of us have to pay democracy's exacting price of eternal vigilance.

In behalf of my colleagues in the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats, I would like to extend my gratitude to the National Democratic Institute here represented by Peter Manikas, the Head of the Asia Team, Ivan Doherty of Washington DC and Laura Thornton who heads the Bangkok office. May this project be the beginning of a meaningful and beautiful relationship between our two organizations bound by common visions and goals. I would like to especially thank all those coming from the different political parties who have set aside differences in pursuit of collective dreams.

A pond that remains stagnant inevitably becomes murky. Only when fresh water flows in could this pond be clean again. Let fresh water flow in and in doing so, we reach the level of purity and uprightness that we all aspire for.

Good day and thank you very much.

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