

Transparency Key to Rooting Out Corruption

By Kim Sue-young
Staff Reporter

Participants in the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Symposium discussed anti-corruption practices and current efforts being made in Seoul, Wednesday.

About 200 high-level government officials and experts from the Asia-Pacific region are participating in the two-day symposium, being held at the JW Marriott Hotel in southern Seoul, to share their experiences.

Under the theme of "Systematic Approach to Building Anti-Corruption Capacity," the symposium was co-hosted by Korea's Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) and the APEC Secretariat.

"Through this symposium, I hope APEC member countries can share their best anti-corruption practices and contribute to corruption-free campaigns in developing countries and more systematic anti-corruption initiatives," Park In-je, acting chairman of the ACRC, told The Korea Times.

In his opening speech, Korean Prime Minister Han Seung-soo said corruption is a major global issue along with environment protection.

"By fighting against pollution and corruption, we will be moving a step closer to making our natural and social world cleaner and a better place to live in," he said.

Stressing the importance of collective action in uprooting corruption, Han introduced the nation's direction to make a corruption-free society.

"President Lee Myung-bak has emphasized on several occasions that Korea's second economic take-off will not be possible unless we uproot corruption in our society and expressed his strong determination to strictly penalize corrupt and illegal behavior," he said.

Panthep Klanarongran, president of Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission, also stressed the importance of the anti-corruption movement, comparing corruption to "cancer."

"Both are malignant, both are swift and silent, both mutate their forms in order to avoid detection, both cause unutterable suffering and misery," he said in a keynote speech.

He continued, "Both ultimately result, if not treated, in death: of the patient in the case of cancer and of the economy, social stability and the very heart of a nation in the case of corruption."



Park In-je, acting chairman of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC), speaks during the opening ceremony of the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Symposium at the JW Marriott Hotel in Seoul, Wednesday.

The Thai official said that just a simple approach to corruption is not enough.

“Not only must corruption be suppressed but, working on the premise that prevention is better than a cure, prevention must be emphasized through the inculcation of ethics and integrity,” he said. “This needs to be done at all levels.”

He suggested adopting codes of conduct in the workplace to ensure that the youth of today become the upright and ethical citizens of tomorrow.

Phil Matsheza, policy advisor at the Anti-Corruption Democratic Governance Group at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), presented international organizations' efforts to build anti-corruption capacity.

He said, “Strong political backing at the highest level of government and political and operational independence of anti-corruption agencies are necessary for effective anti-corruption practices.”

He also highlighted “systematic, long-term, coherent and holistic strategies” such as corruption prevention and awareness.

APEC Anti-Corruption Symposium

The symposium ends today with the third session on best anti-corruption policies to build anti-corruption capacity.

Don W. Fox, general counsel and principal deputy of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics, will speak on the promotion of civil service ethics and have a question-and-answer session.

Soh Kee Hean, director of Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, will explain effective detection and punishment for corruption, while Michael D. Kohn, co-founder and president of the National Whistleblowers Center in the United States, will talk about protection for the promotion of public interest disclosure.

ACRC Leads Transparent Wave

The Korean anti-corruption watchdog was launched in February last year, following the inauguration of President Lee.

The organization has been making efforts to improve the negative image of the country. It replaced the Korea Independent Commission against Corruption (KICAC).

For more systematic and substantial practices, the commission devised a system to gauge how transparent an organization is, the so-called “integrity assessment.”

With results measured by the tool, the ACRC has advised government offices, including Incheon City and the Korea Railroad Corporation (KORAIL), on what to improve and avoid.

Also, it presented a stronger code of conduct for public officials than before in order to help increase transparency.

It contains more clarified criteria related to work proceedings and detailed punishment for public servants who abuse their power and/or receive bribes or other favors.

A whistle-blowing system is a representative part of the ACRC to help eradicate corruption.

It encourages people to report corruption cases by rewarding them and at the same time, protects witnesses by promising anonymity.

Last year, whistleblowers were rewarded with more than 400 million won (\$260,000).

The commission has also spearheaded a transparency campaign in the Asia-Pacific region by sharing its knowhow.

It has given several countries, including Bhutan and Bangladesh, tips on intercepting "black temptation" with \$9.5-million in funds from the UNDP.

The UNDP stresses the prevention of dishonesty under its convention against corruption.

"The ACRC plans to sign a memorandum of understanding with Mongolia and Vietnam in the near future to share our own anti-corruption systems," ACRC Acting Chairman Park said.

Last year, Korea placed 40th, up three spots from a year ago in the transparency index measured by Transparency International.

"It is important to punish people for corruption but the ACRC's role more focuses on preventing such wrongdoings by, for example, eliminating unreasonable regulations," Park said.

"I believe the nation's anti-corruption efforts and sponsorship of this kind of symposium will contribute to raising the national brand value."

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