



Manifesto for Transparency, Accountability and Access to Information

We, members of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD), an umbrella of liberal and political parties in Asia, having constituted ourselves into a formal organization that envisions a society based on personal liberty and responsibility; social justice, human rights and the rule of law; good governance; and the free market economy, hereby declare this manifesto against corruption.

We believe that:

- Corruption is one of the main problems facing many nations and continues to be a bane of peoples all over the world. It is characterized by the decomposition of ethical behavior and the breakdown of social norms and values. It is a major cause of poverty and underdevelopment. It helps perpetuate corrupt and repressive regimes.
- Political parties are the heart and soul of democracies. They form the cornerstone of a democratic society and serve a function unlike any other institution in a democracy. Parties aggregate and represent social interests and provide a structure for political participation. Representative democracy cannot function without alternative parties and candidates to vote for. Political parties are crucial in aggregating interests, presenting political alternatives, candidates, and forming a link between the voters and those elected.
- Political parties, especially those that are ruling or in power, are in a position to curb corruption. Despite the fact that political parties are part of the problem of corruption, they can also be part of the solution.

We recognize that:

- The proper implementation of anti-corruption reform may be politically costly in the short run but there must be political will starting from the ruling political parties themselves.
- Weak institutions often do not have the capacity to meaningfully reform. Often they become hindrances to corruption because of interests groups that benefit from the weakness of institutions.
- Many political parties in Asia are often characterized as personality-oriented and based on patronage with very little ideological cohesion. Political parties often suffer from low public trust. They are often perceived as part of the problem of corruption.

We pledge to:

- Commit ourselves to anti-corruption strategies that are both preventive and punitive in character.

- Instill mechanisms to, among others, appropriate oversight in government spending and foreign assistance; reduce procedural complexity and enhance transparency in government transactions; and, ensure access and right to information.
- Strengthen institutions. Though institutional weakness is a major hindrance to anti-corruption strategies, we should even further prioritize institutional reform. There is the greater need to strengthen institutions both in terms of systems and in terms of human resources. Reform minded leaders and bureaucrats who are of proven competence and integrity must be given positions of importance and responsibility. Reform strategies must be comprehensive and sustainable in the long term.
- Ensure the independence of the three branches of government—executive, legislative and judicial.
- Establish and strengthen independent anti-corruption bodies especially in cases where conventional mechanisms are inadequate or ineffective.
- Engage the active participation of civil society, media and academia.
- Demand mutual accountability and transparency in official development assistance.
- Work towards public access to information and enact/implement laws on right to information.
- Prioritize legislation on civil and criminal provisions against corrupt practices.
- Serve as the main vanguard of reform and set high standards of good governance.

Political will and party discipline must be exercised. Each CALD member party must be consistent with its policies and platform of good governance especially when it is in power. There should be no exemptions and “sacred cows”. Conviction and principles must not be subsumed for the sake of political expediency. Short term political gains must not derail CALD’s vision of liberal democracy where good governance is a major tenet.