

WELCOME REMARKS
HON. LEILA M. DE LIMA
Secretary of Justice

A pleasant morning to everyone and welcome to the 1st National Competition Conference. It is the first event of its kind that focuses on competition reforms anchored on the timeless of idea of giving every man and woman what is due them. The cry for justice, be it criminal, social or economic continues.

We are used to crimes committed in broad daylight, in blood and in gore, with vice and vile. We feel the pain of the victims, the frustration of lost lives and possibilities. And yet there is a full set of activities that may not be seen by the naked eye, but essential to be ferret out for an ordering of society - that those who are in the position of power, money and influence must care and watch out for the little people.

This is a concrete way to address inequality and poverty that haunts each one of us.

The call for economic justice may not be as loud or sexy to merit banner headlines. This conference intends to close this gap in our consciousness that all is well with our recent run of economic growth under a reforming administration.

With the establishment of the country's first competition authority, the Office for Competition is working on making competition in the market fair and free, to continue to level the playing field especially for SMEs. All of us are consumers and we can benefit from more choices whether in telecommunication service, in cable provider, higher quality of products and services including water and commodities, and lower cost in terms of power and transport.

Where supply or prices are fixed or when artificial barriers are erected by dominant firms, consumers suffer and economic development stifled. Without economic justice, there can be no inclusive growth.

Hence the inaugural theme of this conference -“Advancing Economic Justice Through Competition Policy and Law (CPL).” The objective is to gather leading policy makers, thought leaders, action persons, academics and practitioners to understand the socio-political context for competition reforms to take root and take place.

The Office for Competition has made steps in this direction.

It has resolved 12 out of 31 cases received. A first cartel case against an association of LPG dealers and similar complaints on cartel activities have been initiated in several courts in Manila such as the Chevron cases on monopolization of gas service stations and a few more to be filed within the next few months such as that against Davidson Bangayan on rice smuggling and other illegal activities. Article 186 of the Revised Penal Code is gaining new light as provision to go after cartelists and economic saboteurs. We expect more cases in the near future.

The OFC's priority sectors are: telecommunications, energy, transport, and commodities. In the latter industry, we pinpointed a cartel responsible for the unconscionable increase in the price of garlic. In the transport sector, we are calling for the liberalization of the harbor pilots industry and increasing competition in the tugs assistance industry to increase our ports' competitiveness by lowering the cost of transporting goods.

Our Advisories on airline ticket sales and broadband advertisements reminding airlines and internet service providers not to mislead and deceive consumers in order to gain business have brought positive change in the way promotional materials are crafted and disseminated. Our cautionary advice to banks not to coordinate their actions to charge uniform bank fees also benefited millions of depositors.

In the field of education, we had introduced the first competition policy and law course as part of the curriculum for law and business graduate students in a premiere educational institution.

The OFC is here to protect the competitive process. Where regulators are captured or strong lobbies distort policies, we will make sure that the public interest is ascendant. Someone has to play this part to balance the overall health of our society. But know that the OFC is never about being against big business or to increase regulations, it is about making opportunities available for all.

We will continue to deepen the analysis of the bottlenecks and anti-competitive practices in the priority sectors. We will support and share our

experiences with legislators for revisions in our relevant laws and for a simple and fair and updated competition law.

Lastly and in closing, our benchmarks are holding. In the 2014-2015 Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum, the Philippines ranking had leaped to the 52nd spot out of 144 economies, compared to the 59th spot out of 148 last year. According to the WEF, the country's gain of 33 places from 2010 is the largest over that period among all countries.

With economic justice for all as our constant guide, competition reforms will continue. Let me invite all of you to join us in this little journey. May we be inspired by the highest Filipino ideals of being *maka-masa*, the Filipino word for having a soft spot for the poor, and not only think of our own personal interests to gain wealth but to also give others, especially the poor, the opportunity to reap the benefits of economic growth. This is the most important reform.

Thank you and Mabuhay ang Pilipinas.