

September 12, 2012



Anti-Corruption Program in Malaysia -- A Comprehensive Approach

Posted: 06/22/2012 1:06 pm

Change, relatively speaking, came quickly to the Arab Spring countries. Some leaders fled, others stepped down, and one even fought to the death. But behind every popular movement calling for democratic change was an inherent desire for something more: to stop a system and culture ripe with corruption. As the executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime put it, the Arab Spring was an "[emphatic rejection of corruption.](#)"

Yet in mid-2012, with the newly-installed democratic processes flailing, these anti-corruption objectives seem far out of reach. If the Arab Spring countries and other high-risk nations are serious about confronting their corruption culture, they should look to the innovative model instituted by an unlikely actor: Malaysia.

All too often, anti-corruption efforts are incomplete; they pass laws without sufficient enforcement mechanisms, or they maintain a myopic shortsightedness by failing to create a system that will last by appealing to everyone's self-interest.

Malaysia's comprehensive anti-corruption system, a core component of the Prime Minister's Najib bin Tun Abas a unique way by establishing an agency as a foundation, the Information Program, meaning the Report issued on the reform

on a three-pillar approach that recognizing the powerful appeal of to leverage money behind the rich themselves while abusing all ends of society working in

community and civil society in its led to publicly sign an Integrity led in some other countries, : In return for cooperating with or General's office, the Finance tive advantage, such as being / Pact, which the government used as entry requirement for

over exclusive penalties for e to raise the flag of fighting their competitive advantage. should be in each stakeholder's ; the success of this approach

l transparency.

ty of the complaints relatively ite that all corruption cases be ed on its head.

rocesses, facilitating complete :moves much of the discretion it is fully transparent, there will

: not just on enforcement and ublic service announcements, 'sia as well as throughout the

For all the ingenuity and hard work, Malaysia's anti-corruption system -- and the MACC specifically -- are still works-in-progress. Since 2008, the government has already revised the law to address some of the shortcomings, installing a compliance unit, speeding up the trial process, and adding a new clause to the MACC Act that strengthens the roles of the five independent bodies holding the MACC accountable.

There are still imperfections that the government will need to address. Some of these issues, like the "big fish" problem (the public's desire for a quick conviction of a major political player), are political realities; they reflect a public desire to have symbolic victories that are satisfying but do not guarantee the level of comprehensive reform necessary for the system's long-term sustainability. Other issues -- like unregulated campaign finance, the ethnic preference system, and insufficient freedom of information laws -- are challenges outside of the realm of the MACC that will need to be addressed with the ongoing Economic and Government Transformation Program.

Clear goals and commitments to anti-corruption have been demonstrated in Prime Minister Najib's Economic and Government Transformation Programs. They will and should continue in the months and years ahead, regardless of who leads the Malaysian government.

High risk countries offer the most challenging environment for large-scale, comprehensive reform. But as the Arab Spring showed, when these problems of corruption have appeared and have been allowed to fester, a popular movement will demand action. It would behoove these leaders to take a look at the Malaysian model instead.