



Press Statement

27 May 2010

## **A FINAL PUSH FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL**

While we are aware that the members of the House of Representatives are currently preoccupied with the critical task of canvassing the votes cast for the presidential and vice presidential positions in the May 10 elections, we would like to bring to the attention of our congressmen and the public the urgent matter of the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) bill.

The FOI bill was ratified by the Senate in February, but due to the absence of a quorum in the House in the last two days before it adjourned for the election period, the House failed to ratify the measure. Both houses of Congress need to ratify the conference committee report on the FOI bill before it is submitted for the signature of the President.

On May 24, the House reassembled to pave the way for the joint session with the Senate and the convening of the National Board of Canvassers. This period, up to the final adjournment of the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress on June 4, is also the last opportunity for the ratification and passage of the FOI bill. If Congress misses the deadline, the measure will have to be re-filed and again undergo the whole process of committee hearings and plenary debates in each house of Congress, and consolidation and ratification by both houses, before the approval of the President.

The Speaker of the House has committed to take up the bill on May 31. The measure, in its final form, has been forged by consensus, thus its ratification could take as little as five minutes. We sincerely hope that the House—despite its other equally pressing tasks at hand—will not waste the opportunity to advance this landmark bill.

The Right to Information is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution. With the passage of the bill, except for clearly defined exceptions, citizens' access to government information shall be guaranteed, thus raising the bar for transparency and accountability in governance. Citizens' right to information on matters of public concern can no longer be frustrated or held hostage by public officials with dark secrets to hide.

The Makati Business Club therefore calls on the honorable members of the House of Representatives to ratify posthaste the Freedom of Information bill. Let it be written in our nation's history that one of the final acts and an immutable legacy of the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress was the passage of a law that is destined to be one of the essential pillars of Philippine democracy.

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