

## **International Anticorruption Day 2025**

11 December 2025

### **Opening Remarks by John Versantvoort**

Head, Office of Anticorruption and Integrity (OAI)

Thank you, President Kanda, and good afternoon, everyone.

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the 2025 International Anticorruption Day celebration. Whether you are joining us here at headquarters or virtually from across our resident missions and field offices, thank you for being part of this event.

As any compliance expert will tell you, an ethical organizational culture starts with tone from the top. President Kanda, your speech and call to action leave us with no doubt regarding your vision and expectations from all of us.

This year, the Office of Anticorruption and Integrity (or OAI) is partnering with the Procurement, Portfolio, and Financial Management Department (or PPFM) to shine a spotlight on the role of local leadership and procurement reform in building a culture of integrity.

I would like to begin by acknowledging our guests:

- **Victor Maria Regis Sotto**, Mayor of Pasig City, here in the Philippines, and
- **Bernadine Fernz**, Head of Sustainability and Infrastructure at the Open Contracting Partnership.

This year's theme, **Embedding a Culture of Integrity: Lessons from Local Governments**, invites us to reflect on how integrity can be institutionalized—not just as a compliance requirement, but as a shared value that guides decision-making at every level. By learning from the successes of local government leaders, we will explore how

transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement can transform procurement practices and public service delivery.

When we talk about integrity at the local level, we see how leadership and systems work hand in hand to create trust. The same principle applies to us at ADB. Integrity is not just a value we promote externally—it is something we must embed into every ADB staff member and every layer of our operations. This is how we ensure that our commitment to good governance is reflected in every decision we make, every contract we sign, every partnership we build, and every project we deliver.

To ensure integrity is built into every decision, ADB's approach to embedding ethical standards must be strategic and comprehensive.

Firstly, we must have clear **policies and governance frameworks** that guide the entire organization. From there, we translate these principles into clear, enforceable provisions that protect us when things go wrong. These are not just words on a screen or a piece of paper; they are safeguards that uphold accountability and give us the tools to act decisively when integrity is compromised. As we speak, there is a bank-wide effort underway to review and revamp our existing integrity policies. We are looking to adopt a new anticorruption and integrity policy that will reflect best international standards in tackling evolving risks a rapidly changing world.

Secondly, it is critical that ADB knows who is receiving our financing, and that is **why we must conduct thorough integrity due diligence**. Before we engage, we ask tough questions: Who are we dealing with? What is their track record? This helps us identify risks early and make informed decisions. But we do not just check the box when ADB first engages. We must manage these risks throughout the lifecycle of ADB's engagement, continuously monitoring issues and addressing them as they arise.

When problems arise, we don't step back—we step in. We must work side by side with clients and partners to strengthen their systems, improve their practices, and rebuild or strengthen their credibility. In other words, our goal is not just to protect the institution against threats. We must help partners achieve impact, and emerge stronger and more resilient in today's world of emerging risks. This is what it means to be a development institution.

At the same time, we must make it clear that **fraud and corruption on our projects does not pay. This is why we exclude wrongdoers from our projects.** We respond firmly with sanctions against those who commit fraud or corruption to send an unmistakable message: a violation of our integrity standards will not be tolerated.

Of course, integrity cannot be achieved through the Office of Anticorruption and Integrity alone. It requires participation from all of us. As a matter of fact, you—our colleagues across ADB—are the eyes and ears on the ground; and form our first line of defense. You see the details, you know the context, and you can raise the red flags that protect our projects and our reputation.

For those who face integrity challenges on the ground, having the right support is essential. And this is where OAI can play a vital role as the second line of defense. **We are more than an oversight function—we are your partner in this journey.** We are here to help you—by equipping you with the knowledge you need, by providing tools that make your work easier, and by standing with you when complex issues arise that you cannot resolve alone. Finally, in the third line of defense, our Office of the Auditor General provides independent assurance to the Board on our effectiveness in achieving these goals. Together, we will make these three lines work—not as separate functions, but as a united front to safeguard ADB's reputation and mission.

Earlier, President Kanda has asked us to make integrity a daily commitment, embedding it in our role, in our work, and in our decisions. Leadership lights the path, but it requires our shared resolve to walk the path.

In today's panel discussion, moderated by PPFD Director General Aman Trana, our speakers will share their experiences in embedding integrity into public service and procurement systems: what are the tools that effect change and what are practical strategies to foster a culture of integrity.

As we listen to our speakers today, I encourage you to reflect on how we can be champions of integrity in our own roles, in our own departments. What can we do to ensure ADB continues to be a trusted partner in development?

**With that, let me introduce our keynote speaker.**

When he assumed office in 2019, Mayor Sotto charted a decisive course toward transparency and accountability in Pasig City. Under his leadership, Pasig became a model for reform, introducing innovative measures that reshaped procurement practices, strengthened access to information, and empowered citizens to play an active role in governance. These efforts delivered tangible results, earning national recognition and global acclaim for their impact.

Today, he stands as one of the most influential voices in the fight against corruption, demonstrating that principled leadership and systemic change can deliver real impact. His work has not only changed the way a city operates—it has inspired a movement for cleaner, more accountable governance across the region. Now on his third term, Mayor Sotto gained international recognition for fighting corruption with “radical transparency”.



Three months ago, he was named in the Time Magazine's 2025 list of the world's 100 most influential rising stars.

Ladies and gentlemen, join me in welcoming Mayor Vico Sotto.