

Obama opens Clinton Global Initiative Meeting in NYC

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ing investing in gender equality and the need for innovation to help face global crises.

President Barack Obama joined former President Bill Clinton to open Tuesday, Sept. 22, the fifth annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI), timed to coincide with the UN General Assembly on the other side of Manhattan.

CGI brings together leaders from the political, corporate, and civil sectors to develop and implement innovative solutions to four global challenge areas: education, energy & climate change, global health, and economic empowerment.

"This week, even as we gather at the United Nations to discuss what governments can do to confront the challenges of our time, even as we're joined tonight by so many presidents and prime ministers—this Global Initiative reminds us what we can do as individuals: that you don't have to hold public office to be a public servant," President Obama said, adding: "That's the beauty of service—anyone can do it and everyone should try."

Since 2005, more than 100 current and former heads of state; hundreds of leading CEOs, philanthropists, and NGO leaders; and 10 of the last 16 Nobel Peace Prize laureates have attended CGI's Annual Meeting.

President Obama in his keynote speech said, "Bill Clinton has helped improve and save the lives of millions." The President also paid tribute to CGI and its members for the efforts they have been exerting through the years.

"After a lifetime of service, he would have been forgiven had he settled for a life of quiet, a life of ease, a life of improved golf scores—my understanding is they have not improved that much since he was in office—but he chose a different path," Obama said, "This global initiative reminds us of what we can each do as individuals."

The President said the mission of the Clinton Global Initiative reminds everyone of what individuals can do to change the world through service.

"If you want to bring about change in the world, you can't just be an advocate of somebody else doing it. You can't just preach lofty goals and wait for somebody else act. You have to step up. You have to serve."

For his part, Clinton joked that "we'd throw a

party and no one would come" because of the economic meltdown. On the contrary, he reported that the attendance this year is more than the previous years' records.

"In the midst of a global financial crisis, it doesn't surprise me that more people are attending this meeting than ever before," Clinton said. "Since 2005, it has become clear that CGI has found an effective model for addressing challenges around the world."

It was another star-studded opening plenary, attended not just by more than 60 current and former heads of state but also the chief executives of Coca-Cola, Walmart, Nissan, ExxonMobil and Goldman Sachs. Hollywood stars like Matt Damon, Ashton Kutcher, Demi Moore and Jessica Alba added star power to the meeting.

Clinton had warm words and praise for President Obama.

"I think it is worth reminding all of you that our president started his career not in politics, but as an NGO operator, that's what a community organizer is," he said. "He understands why we're here, he understands what we're supposed to do, what government has to do, what the private sector has to do."

President Obama on the other hand, recalled the moment when Clinton asked him to attend this year's CGI meeting.

"I think everyone knows what it's like when Bill Clinton asks you to make a commitment," Obama said. "He looks you in the eye, he feels your pain, he makes you feel like you're the only person in the room. What could I say? I was vulnerable, just like all of you have been vulnerable, to his charms."

The audience clapped in approval. The President also talked about how we as a people now stand at a "transformational moment" in world history when our "interconnected world presents us at once with great promise, but also with great peril."

He also called for the creation of new partnerships and alliances.

"Today's threats demand new partnerships across sectors and across societies—creative collaborations to achieve what no one can accomplish alone. In short, we need a new spirit of global part-

nership. And that is exactly the spirit that guides this organization; I hope that it is the spirit that guides my administration."

Filipino in the CGI

Filipino broadcaster Rico Hizon is excited to join his second CGI meeting. He attended last year's first and last CGI Asia meeting in Hong Kong, where he met former President Clinton.

"It is very inspirational," Hizon said of Obama's speech, "Anything that comes out from his mouth is very inspirational. That we should all unite and that change should come from the bottom is the right thing to do."

The BBC Asia broadcaster believes that the challenges the world faces on climate change can be fought and it is something that can be done with the business conglomerates who can still earn while doing something good for the environment. Hizon moderated the CGI Asia panel on climate change last year.

This year, Hizon moderated the dinner panel discussion on emerging markets at the Rockefeller Center Tuesday, Sept. 22. He was personally invited by former President Clinton to moderate this panel.

"It is a very interesting topic because we focused on emerging markets, innovations and new ideas—how the likes of China, India, Brazil, Russia are emerging with their ways to compete with the western powerhouses. We are looking at it at the flipside of the equation," Hizon told the *Asian Journal*.

Hizon is the only Asian broadcast journalist invited so he was totally floored when he received the invitation.

In President Clinton's letter to Hizon, he said, "You were such a wonderful addition to our program in Hong Kong and we hope you will be able

to join us once again, and serve as moderator at the Emerging Markets dinner. We'd be delighted if you could lend your voice to this timely discussion."

"It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be invited again by the former US President. I'm really excited to be part of this event, not only representing BBC World News, but more importantly raising the Filipino flag in this prestigious event," Hizon said.

Hizon, a 2006 TOYM (The Outstanding Young Men) Awardee for Broadcast Journalism is the only Filipino and Asian broadcast journalist to anchor for two of the world's most prestigious news organizations, CNBC and BBC World News.

Attendees are expected to make concrete commitments on steps they will take to work on those problems. Since the first conference, 1,400 commitments have been made, said Robert Harrison, the chief executive officer of CGI. Some have been worth billions of dollars. Those who don't follow through on their commitments are not allowed to return.

Harrison said the economic downturn would probably have an impact on the monetary amounts committed at this year's conference.

"We expect to have comparable number of commitments made," he said, but acknowledged, "they will probably not be of the same magnitude. The dollar values are likely to be lower."

As Day 1 drew to a close, Clinton called on attendees to support political and economic efforts toward climate sustainability.

"If you have political leadership and business leadership committed to sustainability, the rest of us need to support them," Clinton said. "The best thing we can do is to try to help support this movement by proving that it is good economics."

(*Momar Visaya, with reports from AP*)

No C-5 Road overprice, says BIR exec

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variation submitted to us by the City Assessor's Office classifying the same property as commercial and residential as to its actual use," Bacod explained.

Madrigal's lawyer, Ernesto Francisco, had earlier claimed that Villar might have falsified the zonal valuation to drastically jack up the real estate value of the lots, which were sold to the government as C-5's right of way.

Residential lots in Parañaque have a zonal valuation of about P4,000 per square meter.

"The reason why it is P30,000 per square meter is because it is not fully developed. Some are commercial, that is why it is P30,000. It (Maisato property) is valued at P30,000 per square meter because it is along a commercial area," she said.

She said the basis was BIR's determination that the property is located in Barangay San Dionisio, Parañaque, which is a commercial area.

Apology in order

After the hearing, lawyer Adel Tamano, spokesperson of Villar's Nationalista Party, demanded an apology from Francisco for accusing the senator of falsifying documents.

"I think it really is time to make an apology, as a gentleman, Attorney Francisco should apologize to Adelfa (Properties), apologize to Senator Villar, because last week he was claiming that the certification was falsified. He is claiming that the BIR was bribed, that the certification issued was false," said Tamano.

Tamano noted that Francisco appeared stunned by Bacod's testimony.

"Thus, we can see political (undertones) in the ongoing (ethics) investigation. It is really a waste of time. Instead of proving their case, they were totally demolished by their own very witness," said Tamano. ■

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