Official Statement

PAASCU CHARGES AGAINST CHED, BASELESS AND INACCURATE

In December 2014, two broadsheets published a news article about the criminal and administrative case filed in the Ombudsman by Joel E. Tabora S.J., President of the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) against Patricia B. Licuanan, Chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Leo Y. Querubin, President of the Philippine Computer Society (PCS). The case, according to the newspapers, is “based on a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) dated April 21, 2014, where the CHED allocated to the PCS the amount of P10M as mobilization fund for the creation of an accrediting body known as the PCS-Information Computing Accreditation Board (PICAB).” Accordingly, PAASCU charged that the accused violated the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act by not complying with the procurement law and that “PCS is not qualified to render the services provided for under the MOA because it is not an accrediting agency.”

Both newspapers mentioned PAASCU’s claim that “Licuanan deliberately ignored existing accrediting bodies under the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines because the agreement that has been entered into was utterly disadvantageous to the government.” By giving PCS “unwarranted benefits, advantage and preference,” Licuanan allegedly “exceeded her and CHED’s powers when she entered into the questioned MOA” and thus “caused undue injury to the complainant PAASCU.”

Responding to the newspaper articles and the queries of stakeholders in the absence of a copy of the charge, CHED categorically states that the PAASCU criminal and administrative case against CHED Chair Patricia Licuanan and PCS Chair Leo Querubin has no basis. The Commission’s provision of mobilization funds for the creation of the PICAB and its application to the Seoul Accord for provisional membership is neither a criminal act of graft and corruption nor a breach of government auditing and accounting rules and procedures. The arrangement under this official partnership was undertaken pursuant to the mandate and authority of the Commission under its Charter, specifically Sections 8 and 10 of Republic Act No. 7722 which stipulate the powers and functions of the Commission, which include the following:

- To formulate and recommend development plans, policies, priorities and programs on higher education and research;
Performs such other functions as may be necessary for its effective operations and for the continued enhancement, growth and development of higher education;

Administer the Higher Education Development Fund as described in Section 10 hereunder, which will promote the purposes of higher education.

The Higher Education Development Fund referred to as the Fund in RA 7722 was “established exclusively for the strengthening of higher education in the entire country.”

Pursuant to a similar official arrangement, the Commission in 2012 provided funds in support of the Philippine Technological Council (PTC)—the umbrella organization of all the societies of engineering professionals in the country—particularly in its effort to establish an accreditation body that is compliant with the eligibility requirements of the Washington Accord, i.e., that the accreditation body “must be independent of the educational providers delivering accredited programmes.” This independence from educational providers is common to the accreditation bodies in the Washington as well as the Seoul Accord. In the case of the Washington Accord, the members are either agencies created by law but independent of government, or are professional associations with an engineering accreditation body.

As regards the Washington Accord, an accreditation agency in each of the following jurisdictions—Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States—constitutes the signatories of the Washington Accord. On the other hand, the signatories of the Seoul Accord, consist of an accreditation agency in each of the following jurisdictions—Australia, Canada, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, United Kingdom, and the United States. In each of these countries, the accreditation bodies are independent from educational providers.

The Seoul Accord is an international mutual-recognition agreement among agencies responsible for the accreditation of tertiary-level computing and Information Technology (IT)-related qualifications. The Washington Accord also operates as a similar agreement among accreditation agencies responsible for the engineering disciplines in member jurisdictions.

CHED’s decision to support the PTC in 2010, rather than the existing accreditation bodies with much longer track records, was premised mainly on the eligibility requirement of the Washington Accord. Upon the advice of Filipino experts on the Washington Accord, CHED interpreted the provision cited earlier to mean that none of the existing accreditation bodies under the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP) and the National Network of Accreditation Agencies, Inc. (NNQAA)—the two umbrella organizations of accreditation agencies recognized by CHED—were eligible for membership in the Washington Accord in view of the fact that schools, colleges and universities, including those with engineering programs, constitute the membership of these bodies. It has also
been the practice that most accreditors under these umbrella organizations come from member schools.

Reinforcing this decision is CHED's recent thrust towards the development of learner outcomes-based accreditation standards: standards that align with that of the Washington Accord but appear to be a matter still in contention with existing recognized accreditation bodies. Such standards aim to ensure that institutions with accredited programs demonstrate the following:

1. Their engineering graduates have met the acceptable knowledge, proficiencies and attitudes demanded by their different fields of practice;
2. Their program outcomes are aligned with their respective mission and educational objective; and
3. Their outcomes-based education system is supported by a continuous quality improvement system.

Since the Philippine higher education system was still heavily inputs-based and instructor-centered in 2010—despite CHED’s goal to develop a learning competency based education—the Commission issued CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 37, series of 2012 entitled Policies, Standards and Guidelines for the Establishment of an Outcomes-based Education System in Higher Education Institutions Offering Engineering Programs to align the teaching of the engineering disciplines with increasingly international standards, thus facilitating membership in international agreements like the Washington Accord.

It is important to note that CHED explained to PAASCU and the other accreditation bodies its decision to provide mobilization funds to PTC. CHED Chair Licuanan appealed at the time for cooperation among PTC and existing accreditation bodies, assuring the latter that the Commission’s mobilization support to PTC is not intended to affect the local accreditation of engineering programs by PAASCU and other agencies under the FAAP and NNQAA.

Even then, it was clear to CHED that support to PTC in the form of mobilization funds would not make it a government institution nor subject its policies, procedures and evaluations to government influence or intervention. CHED’s mobilization support to PTC is merely consistent with its provision of development funds to recognized accreditation bodies under FAAP and NNQAA, and the higher education institutions seeking program accreditation from them. In the case of PTC, the raison d'être for CHED’s support is to ensure that the Philippines has an accreditation body composed of engineering professionals who will be eligible for full membership in the Washington Accord. To date, PTC has been nominated by Australia and Taiwan, and after exerting much effort with CHED assistance, has successfully attained provisional membership in 2013. It is now preparing to make a bid for the coveted regular membership.
Membership in both the Washington and Seoul Accords for the Philippines would result in the international recognition in member jurisdictions of the qualifications of Filipino IT professionals and engineers who are educated in higher education institutions accredited by the signatory accreditation agency. It promises to give such Filipino professionals a better chance in the global labor market, and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation in the form of lower compensation than their counterparts as manifested in some of the countries Filipino professionals currently work in. More importantly, membership in both Accords is expected to contribute to raising the quality of engineering and IT education so as to build a critical mass of competent professionals committed to staying in the country and developing potential niches for the Philippine economy.

In the proper exercise, therefore, of both its regulatory authority and developmental mandate over all higher education institutions and academic programs, CHED came to the inevitable consensus that membership in both Accords and in other international Agreements in the future is deemed crucial for the positioning of the country in the ASEAN Economic Community.

The decision to help the Philippines achieve international recognition for its professionals through applications to international registers like the APEC Register and support for the bid of eligible bodies for membership in mutual recognition agreements started initially with the Washington Accord for engineering followed by the Seoul Accord for computing and IT-related disciplines. This decision was not CHED’s alone but is traceable to the strategy crafted by the bicameral Congressional Commission on Science, Technology and Engineering (COMSTE).

Established through the passage of a joint resolution in the 13th Congress (July 2004-June 2007), COMSTE’s mandate was extended to the 14th Congress (July 2007-June 2010) and to the 15th Congress (July 2010-June 2013) by joint resolutions. The 13th Congress defined the composition of COMSTE as five members of the Senate, five members of the House of Representatives and a Technical Secretariat headed by an Executive Director. Further, COMSTE was organized with six Panels overseen by a Technical Advisory Council (TAC) under the management of its chair, then Senator Edgardo Angara. The TAC and the Panels consisted of highly respected and widely recognized Filipino experts.

Apart from striving for international recognition for Filipino professionals, COMSTE also pushed simultaneously for another strategy—i.e., the significant government investment in academic research that would translate into technological innovations and create new spin-off opportunities through the Engineering, Research and Development for Technology (ERDT) program, among other strategies covering the areas of food and agriculture; energy and environment; the health sciences (including Telehealth); industrial research and development; and renewable energy. The motivation behind the COMSTE-crafted strategies as similarly shared by CHED is to leverage the country’s human resources for national development and global competitiveness.
Building on previous reform policy recommendations and initiatives, and influenced significantly by the foregoing COMSTE-crafted strategies, CHED’s 2010-2016 Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) therefore incorporated both capacity development in Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture and Mathematics (STEAM) as well as compliance with international conventions and the provision of initial mobilization support for the bid for membership in international Accords. These strategies straddle two of HERA’s four clusters of reform intervention:

1. Capacity-Building and the honing of competencies of Filipino students for the 21st century especially in priority areas for the country’s development; and
2. Programs to achieve Excellence (e.g. support for Centers of Excellence, Centers of Development; Networks of Research Institutions; and collaborative research for technological innovations, among others).

The provision of Access to higher education especially for poor but deserving students and Reforms in CHED’s internal bureaucracy towards greater transparency and accountability, make up the other two Clusters under CHED’s Higher Education Reform Agenda.

When it was time to support the bid of an IT accreditation body for provisional membership in the Seoul Accord, CHED applied the same interpretation of the relevant definitions in Section B of the Seoul Accord documents on Rules and Procedures, which are akin to those of the Washington Accord:

**B.1 Definitions:**

**Applicant:** “An organization that has applied for provisional status in the Accord. Any such authority, agency or institution must be independent of the academic institutions delivering programs that may be accredited by the organization”; and

**Signatory:** “An organisation entitled to fully participate in the Accord….must be independent of the academic institutions delivering the programs that they may accredit or recognize. They are typically authorities, agencies, or institutions which are representative of the computing and IT-related professions and which have statutory powers to recognize professional authority for accrediting programs designed to satisfy the academic requirements for entry into the professional computing and IT-related community.”

In the field of IT, the equivalent of the Engineering Accreditation Commission under the Accrediting and Certification Board for Engineering and Technology (ACBET) of the PTC is the PICAB. Like PTC’s accreditation body in 2012, PICAB is newly established by the four existing Philippine associations of professionals in the computing or IT-related fields led by the Philippine Computer Society. The other associations are the Philippine Software Industry Association (PSIA); the Philippine Society of Information Technology Educators (PSITE) and the Computing Society of the Philippines (CSP). While they were newly
established accreditation bodies at the time of application to their respective Accords, the accreditation/recognition system approach and procedures (e.g. outcomes-based accreditation criteria) of both PTC and PICAB were developed for compatibility with those of the Signatories or full members of the Accords.

As of November 2014, PICAB, pursuant to the authority under the agreement forged with CHED has since accredited the programs in two campuses of a higher education institution, with representatives of four member jurisdictions in the Seoul Accord—the Vice President of the Accreditation Board for Engineering Education of Korea (ABEEK); the current Chair of the American Board for Engineers and Technology Inc.’s (ABET) Computing Accreditation Commission (CAC); a Board Director, Professional Standards, Australian Computer Society (ACS); and the Chair for the Seoul Accord of the Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (JABEE)—observing the accreditation process.

Unlike engineering for which CHED had to issue a separate Memorandum Order in 2012 on the policies, standards and guidelines for the shift to outcomes-based education that would align the standards with those of full members of the Washington Accord, there was no need for such an order during the time it considered the same for IT. When the PCS proposal reached CHED, the agency was already implementing CMO 46, series of 2012 entitled, Policy Standard to Enhance Quality Assurance (QA) in Philippine Higher Education through an Outcomes-Based and Typology-Based QA. This CMO called for a paradigm shift to learning competency-based standards in higher education and an outcomes-based quality assurance that nevertheless gives due importance to the role of inputs and processes. A subsequent CHED Administrative Order (No. 1, series of 2014) further substantiated the provision of CMO 46, series of 2012 regarding the shift to learning competency-based education within a lifelong learning framework for disciplinal programs.

At the time CHED resolved to support PICAB as it had earlier done with PTC, it had no information whatsoever of PAASCU’s interest to apply to the Seoul Accord. It only learned of the Association’s intention during the 2014 Seoul Accord meeting in New Zealand where PAASCU participated for the first time as observer and where the CHED supported delegation also served as observers for the second time. Some members of this delegation had already participated in the June 2013 Seoul Meeting, a year before the June 2014 New Zealand meeting but without CHED support. It is important to note that apart from the Commission’s interpretation of the eligibility criteria—i.e., the definition of “Applicant” and “Signatory” and the outcomes-based approach to accreditation of the full members of the Washington and Seoul Accord—the PAASCU intention came as a surprise to CHED because of the Association’s much publicized objections, along with the Catholic Education Association of the Philippines (CEAP), to CMO 46, series of 2012 in general and to outcomes-based education and accreditation in particular.

By way of a background, the idea to form PICAB emerged in the discussions of some leaders of the IT professional community earlier than its request for support from CHED in 2014. On 4 December 2012, some of these leaders met with the incumbent Chair of the
Seoul Accord to explore the possibility of provisional membership for a Philippine accrediting agency. During this meeting, the group was informed that the Seoul Accord actually built on the experience of the American Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and is thus compatible with the latter. The group also learned that an applicant to the Seoul Accord must be able to show how its criteria, process and facilities are compatible with those of member accreditation bodies. The Chair subsequently invited the group to attend the 20-21 June 2013 meeting in Seoul, South Korea as observers.

By the first quarter of 2014, the Philippine Computer Society (PCS)—which by then already had serious discussions with the other IT-related professional associations regarding a collective bid for membership in the Seoul Accord—approached CHED for mobilization support similar to what the Commission provided PTC in its application to the Washington Accord. The first PCS proposal submitted to CHED went through the CHED Technical Panel composed of experts in the IT discipline, as required under Section 12 of RA 7722. As part of their engagement with CHED, the Technical Panel set stringent conditions for funding of the proposal in line with government rules and procedures. PCS subsequently revised its proposal along the comments of the Technical Panel, which in turn recommended, after extensive deliberation, the revised proposal to the CHED Management Committee (MANCOM) and Commission en Banc (CEB). The CHED MANCOM and CEB initially deferred their decision and approved the proposal only after it was revised and presented in a subsequent meeting.

In handing down its decision, the Commission was deeply concerned about the fact that PICAB’s inability to apply for membership in the Seoul Accord in February 2015 would mean that the next application to the Accord of an eligible Philippine accreditation body, can only be made in 2017—or two years after the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community. The CEB deemed it too late for a Filipino accrediting body to apply in 2017 for in truth, the Philippines possesses a feasible potential niche in the Information Technology sector. As far as the higher value-added Philippine software industry is concerned, for instance, the country had 300 software start-ups in October 2013. However, many more are needed to reach a target of about US$5B in revenue by 2016. Meeting this and other IT-related targets entail the continuing production of competent IT program graduates. But this is not sufficient. It is also imperative that Filipino competence in IT beyond the country’s shores be recognized to attract investors.

In this regard, membership in the Seoul Accord, as in the Washington Accord, promises to be the most feasible way of helping achieve recognition of its human resource capacity in this area, and directly or indirectly, stimulating critical improvements in the country’s IT education. Among other indicators, the Philippines’ position as the sixth largest country source of the Silicon Valley work force suggests the very real possibility of making IT a potential niche that may give the country a competitive edge in the ASEAN Economic Community. CHED would be in dereliction of its primordial duty to seize the singular opportunity provided by membership to the Seoul Accord at the time it did, by not supporting the most viable and eligible group of IT professionals that could make a big
difference for the IT sector, including higher education institutions with quality recognized IT programs.

Contrary to PAASCU’s claim, the resulting Memorandum of Agreement between CHED and PCS does not allocate the sum of P10 million directly to PCS or PICAB, since, as determined by the CHED Bids and Awards Committee, it is not eligible under the Procurement Law to handle funds directly as an outsourced entity of CHED. Instead, CHED approved the allocation of P10M to reimburse the mobilization activities of PICAB that may be funded by government, because this arrangement is, in effect, a tie up with PCS primarily for its technical expertise as Convenor of the country’s IT associations/experts. In collaboration with one another, these IT professionals would enable the application to the Seoul Accord of PICAB as an accreditation body that would meet the Seoul Accord criteria. This MOA and the MOA forged with PTC that precedes it, are therefore considered to be the mechanisms that implement the strategic decision of COMSTE to proactively enhance the position of the Philippines and that of Filipino professionals in the ASEAN region and the world. These partnerships decided upon by CHED in accordance with its statutory mandate for the noble purpose of strengthening both public and private higher education institutions, were thus entered into in the national interest as fully explained above, and not at all in the pursuit of any conjured vested interests of Licuanan, Querubin and the entities they respectively represent.

Against this backdrop, the PAASCU criminal and administrative charge against CHED Chair Patricia Licuanan and PCS Chair Leo Querubin is baseless, inaccurate and has no factual or legal leg to stand on. Not only was the decision arrived at collegially by the Commission en Banc upon the recommendation of the Technical Panel and endorsement of the MANCOM and not by Licuanan alone, it was made judiciously following the CHED vetting process; the eligibility requirement of the Seoul Accord as articulated in its definition of “Applicant” and “Signatory” to the Accord and interpreted by expert CHED advisers on ABET, the Washington Accord and the Seoul Accord; CHED’s precedent support to and experience with PTC vis-à-vis the accreditation criteria/system approach required for provisional membership; and government auditing and accounting procedures.

The foregoing statement is being issued so the public may know the clear facts and unvarnished truth behind PAASCU’s complaint.

Issued this 20th day of January 2015 at the Higher Education Development Center Building, C.P. Garcia Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City.

FOR THE COMMISSION:

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Chairperson