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The appropriate response to AMLC Executive Director Ronel Buenaventura's testimony is not to demonize the institution but to examine the numbers

There is a temptation in politically charged cases to attack the messenger when the message becomes uncomfortable. That temptation was evident in the reaction to the testimony of the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) before the Senate sitting as an impeachment court, with some attempting to portray the AMLC as politically motivated, as though the financial intelligence it presented were merely another partisan accusation against Vice President Sara Duterte.

That misses the institutional character of the AMLC.



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The AMLC is not a political creation of the impeachment prosecution. It is a creature of law. Created under Republic Act No. 9160, the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2001, it is the Philippines' financial intelligence unit, mandated to receive and analyze covered and suspicious transaction reports and to help protect the integrity of the country's financial system. It is therefore not an optional commentator in this process but part of the country's financial accountability architecture.

This is why Monday's testimony is so important, and why the attempt to prevent it from being heard deserves attention.

Before examining what the AMLC found, it is worth considering what almost prevented the country from hearing it. The defense sought to exclude AMLC Secretariat Executive Director Ronel Buenaventura from testifying, invoking the confidentiality provisions of the Anti-Money Laundering Act and questioning the disclosure of financial information in the agency's possession.



The objection was significant. If accepted broadly, it could have prevented the country's financial-intelligence agency from explaining to the constitutional court the very information it is legally mandated to collect and analyze.

The presiding officer, Senator Francis Escudero, rejected the defense position.

His ruling recognized a distinction that should be obvious but is sometimes deliberately blurred: confidentiality is not the same as immunity from lawful inquiry. Section 8-A of the AMLA protects information against unauthorized disclosure, but it cannot reasonably be interpreted to disable the AMLC from performing the investigative and litigation functions that the law itself gives it, or from complying with a lawful and particularized subpoena from the

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impeachment court. The Senate also recognized that the Bank Secrecy Law itself provides an exception to confidentiality for impeachment proceedings.

This is remarkably consistent with the position earlier advanced by former AMLC executive director Vicente Aquino years ago.



Aquino argued that Section 8-A's confidentiality rule is not absolute. The law itself contemplates information exchange, dissemination and access under appropriate circumstances. He specifically maintained that the prohibition does not prevent lawful disclosure to courts and authorized government agencies.

More fundamentally, Aquino reminded us why the AMLC exists in the first place. It was created to gather financial information, analyze suspicious and covered transactions, investigate money laundering and assist courts and partner agencies in proceedings involving the preservation, recovery and forfeiture of assets. Information gathered by the AMLC becomes valuable when it can be properly used by competent authorities.

The convergence between Aquino's institutional argument and the impeachment court's ruling is therefore significant. Confidentiality protects financial information from unauthorized disclosure; it cannot become a legal shield that prevents a competent constitutional tribunal from examining financial intelligence through a lawful process.