

PRESS RELEASE

End impunity for corruption, says global NGO network at UN summit

Panama City, 25 November 2013 — As 1,500 government delegates from around the world, including 35 ministers, gather in Panama City for the opening of the biennial conference for the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), hundreds of anticorruption NGOs are calling on them to step up their anti-graft efforts and end impunity. The meeting marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the UNCAC, which covers all aspects of corruption prevention and criminal enforcement.

“Corruption is no ordinary crime. It destroys people’s lives around the world and too many governments are acting agonizingly slowly,” said Vincent Lazatin, chair of the UNCAC Coalition, a network representing 350 public interest groups worldwide. “People are fed up and want governments to get serious about implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption. It is time to end impunity.”

The UNCAC Coalition is calling on governments to take concrete steps on prevention, criminalization, and asset recovery.

They say there must be public registers of company ownership to disclose the true owners of financial assets, in line with the provisions of the UNCAC. “Everyone knows that shell companies with secret owners are being used to launder corruption loot and other proceeds of crime” said Manfredo Marroquin of the Guatemalan NGO Accion Ciudadana, one of the Coalition’s member organisations. “But so far nothing has been done about it. We want to see action now, not tomorrow.”

The Coalition also wants action to remove major roadblocks that hinder the investigation, apprehension and prosecution of embezzlers, bribe-payers, bribe-takers and those laundering the proceeds of corruption. They say governments need to correct lack of protection for whistle blowers, immunities for public officials, settlements that are too lenient, and lack of independence and resourcing for the judiciary and enforcement authorities.

According to the Coalition the rate of returning corruption proceeds to the countries of origin is abysmally low and needs to be accelerated. “All these failures in enforcement systems add up to impunity for the corrupt,” Marroquin said. “All our efforts to ensure sustainable and equitable development will fail if we lose the battle against corruption”,

With President Ricardo Martinelli of Panama opening the UN summit today, delegations will start week-long discussions about these issues. There were at least seven resolutions circulating ahead of the conference from countries including from Colombia, El Salvador,

Mexico and Panama, as well as Nigeria, Norway, Switzerland and the US. "We hope that the end results after negotiations this week will be meaningful and give momentum to the UN Convention rather than stopping at being mere declarations of good intentions," said Gillian Dell, of Transparency International, which provides the secretariat to the Coalition.

According to the Coalition, a battle is brewing at the conference over NGO access to the proceedings. Although the UNCAC underlines the importance of transparency and participation of civil society in the fight against corruption, several governments don't want that language to apply at international level. To date, they have blocked UNCAC Coalition members and other NGOs from attending meetings of the UNCAC oversight body that should be open to observers, according to the rules of procedure. That body will be meeting during the conference and will once again face efforts to block the admission of NGOs. "It's a sorry state of affairs when the values and principles of an international treaty are disregarded by its oversight body," said Dell. "Civil society organisations need to be present and follow the processes so they can make technical inputs and help disseminate information about the Convention."

Note to Editors:

The comprehensive United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is the only global legal framework for combating corruption worldwide. It is a binding agreement among 168 states parties on standards and requirements for preventing, detecting, investigating and sanctioning corruption.

The Conference of States Parties in Panama for the UNCAC is the fifth such conference which began in 2006. Civil society organizations, public interest groups and non-government organizations have been pushing for greater citizen participation in the UNCAC implementation and review process as well as greater transparency governments' progress in complying with the convention.

The UNCAC Coalition, formed in 2006, is a network of more than 350 civil society organisations in over 100 countries. Its goal is to promote ratification, implementation and monitoring of the UN Convention against Corruption. The Coalition sent a [statement](#) to the Conference of States Parties recommending specific steps to be taken at the 5th UNCAC Conference of States Parties in Panama, 25 to 29 November, in the areas of prevention and punishment of corruption.

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