

UN Corruption Conference: Failure to act on critical issue a 'major setback' for the fight against corruption

Bali, 01 February 2008

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Transparency International (TI) and a broad civil society anti-corruption coalition have labelled as a major setback the failure of the international corruption conference on Bali to agree on how to independently assess country progress in implementing the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

Disagreement at the conference meant that concrete steps will only be decided at the next Conference on the Convention in late 2009, six years after the instrument was adopted. Civil society groups now fear a failure to build momentum and a downgrading of the Convention on political agendas. They characterised it as a disappointment for the billions of victims of corruption, who are meant to be represented by the national delegations at the UN conference.

Transparency International's Director of Global Programmes Christiaan Poortman stated that, "without a robust monitoring programme, the UN Convention will fail to become an effective tool in the global fight against corruption. And with such a pressing need for action, and continuing severe consequences for the world's most vulnerable, the world's leaders cannot afford to stay in a holding pattern."

During the conference, the proposals of negotiating blocks diverged widely on the form a country progress review programme should take, and in terms of the transparency of the process and the participation of civil society. After a week of tough negotiations, country delegates struggled through to the evening of the last day to arrive at consensus. Conflicting positions on the role of civil society kept delegates locked in discussions through to the very end. As the conference closed, the question remained unresolved.

Despite a week of negotiations, the outcome in Bali failed to meet the promise of the first conference in Jordan, which recognised a review mechanism as being of 'paramount importance' and the need as 'urgent'. It is therefore essential that there be an ongoing programme of engagement and planning by the UN and governments in the two years until the next conference, so that no further opportunity is missed.

The results fell far short of the progress civil society groups had hoped to see, but there were a few positive notes. A great deal of emphasis was rightly placed on the recovery of stolen assets, a key issue for many developing countries including Indonesia, Nigeria and Peru, which have been burdened by kleptocratic regimes.

Agreement to expand the country self-assessment programme and the pilot programme for country peer review, represented modest but constructive steps towards building a more robust review approach. The success of all aspects of the Convention depends on the strength of a monitoring programme.

Civil society pressed for greater protection of critical voices, pointing to the difficulties whistle-blowers, activists, trade unionists and investigative journalists encounter when speaking out against corruption. Many of the civil society representatives attending the event told of painful, personal encounters with harassment, intimidation and reprisals.

Civil society coalition coordinator Kirsty Drew, of trade union anti-corruption network UNICORN, said, "The success of the fight against corruption depends fundamentally on the presence of independent voices and commentators." Drew continued, "We remain committed to making this convention a success, and although we exercise our right to comment critically, we are ready to play our role as constructive partners in this process and as mediator among citizens, workers, communities, governments and the private sector."

Lilian Ekeanyanwu, chairperson of Nigeria's Zero Corruption Coalition and a member of Transparency International Nigeria, struck a note of disappointment, "Many of us, from countries where this is a life or death issue, will be heading home having heard little more than rhetoric. It's difficult to overstate the role of the corruption fight in guaranteeing a better quality of life and equitable economic growth. That is why we came all this way to be at this conference."

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For more information on priority issues around the convention including asset recovery, technical assistance, the role of the private sector and regional implications, see: <http://www.transparency.org/content/download/29372/445965>

To read the 'Declaration to protect anti-corruption advocates' issued by the Coalition of Civil Society Friends of the UNCAC please click [here](#).

Note to editors:

Transparency International is the civil society organization leading the global fight against corruption. www.transparency.org

The Coalition of Civil Society Friends of the UNCAC, established in early 2006, is committed to promoting the ratification, implementation and monitoring of the landmark UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Over 50 international and national CSOs have already joined the Coalition. They include Transparency International (TI), UNICORN, Oxfam, Article 19, Global Witness, International Council on Human Rights Policy, Institute for Security Studies and others.

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