

PRESS RELEASE

**G8 and MENA region leaders should speed up
the return of proceeds of corruption**

UNCAC Coalition seeks Arab Forum action

25 October, 2013 Berlin/Buenos Aires/Lagos/Manila/Paris/ Rabat. A coalition of 350 public interest groups today called on governments at the Arab Forum on Asset Recovery to commit to improving processes for returning the proceeds of corruption to the countries from which they were taken.

“The people of Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen have the right to expect the international community to do more to help them recover massive amounts of embezzled and corruptly diverted funds,” said Vincent Lazatin, the UNCAC Coalition Chair.

In a letter sent to the Arab Forum today, ahead of its meeting in Morocco, 26 -28 October, the UNCAC Coalition identifies priority actions to be taken within the framework of the landmark UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The proposals build on lessons learned from asset recovery cases, including pending cases arising from the Arab Spring.

The Coalition identifies four key areas for action: three are directed at countries receiving the proceeds of corruption, and the fourth is directed at those seeking return.

The Coalition says that countries receiving suspicious assets should have in place the tools to take proactive enforcement action. If there is credible information that corruption proceeds have been deposited in bank accounts or have been used to buy property within their jurisdiction, they should freeze and investigate those assets without waiting for a request from the victim state. “It is well-known that the longer enforcement authorities wait, the harder it is to trace and recover stolen assets.” said Saad Filali Meknassi, the Coalition’s regional coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa.

The Coalition is also calling for compensation to be awarded to countries for the loss or harm suffered from the bribing of their government officials by foreign companies. Such compensation is in line with UNCAC provisions and should be part of any legal proceedings against foreign bribery.

The Coalition also proposes establishment of systematic-information exchange among countries regarding pending investigations and enforcement proceedings.

The fourth area for action is transparency and accountability in the return of assets, in line with UNCAC commitments on transparent financial management. “Too often, there is secrecy surrounding the return, which increases the risk of the returned proceeds of corruption being misdirected,” Filali Meknassi said. “The public has the right to know about assets returned to the public treasury, and they should be properly accounted for.”

The Coalition has proposed these four measures ahead of a major UN anti-corruption summit taking place in Panama from 25-29 November 2013, providing a forum for discussions and decisions on how to improve global asset recovery efforts.

Note to Editors:

Established in 2012, the **Arab Forum on Asset Recovery** (AFAR) is a stand-alone initiative that supports asset recovery efforts by Arab Countries in Transition. It works as a platform to bring together the G8 and the Deauville Partnership, as well as countries in the Arab World to cooperate in the return of stolen assets.

The **United Nations Convention against Corruption** (UNCAC) is the most comprehensive global legal framework for combating corruption. It is a binding agreement by 168 states parties on standards and requirements for preventing, detecting, investigating and sanctioning corruption. It embodies an international consensus to recover and repatriate the proceeds of corruption: the "return of assets" is identified as "a fundamental principle" of the convention (UNCAC, Article 51). Chapter V of the UNCAC lays out a comprehensive legal framework to support international asset recovery.

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.

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