Madam chair, Excellencies, Delegates,

On behalf of Transparency International Sri Lanka, I thank Egypt for its hospitality in hosting this conference. We very much regret that our respected colleagues from Transparency International Georgia could not be here with us, to address this assembly.

Capital flight, due to corruption that pilfers away public finances, is a significant problem in developing States. These public funds are lost to development of roads, healthcare services, education, law enforcement and other public services. The deprivation of such funds, traps developing countries in poverty with very real daily consequences for the average citizen.

Developing countries do have a long way to go, both in terms of legal reform, as well as institutional strengthening. There remains a great need to align domestic laws with the standards set by UNCAC and other best practices, including new tools such as asset disclosure transparency, non-conviction-based asset forfeiture and better asset management mechanisms to avoid re-corruption of returned assets. However, allow me today, to focus on the cooperation needed from the international community, in our fight against corruption.

From a developing country perspective, we cannot emphasize enough the need for legal, regulatory and policy change that leads to better transparency, accountability and law enforcement in destination countries to which assets have been siphoned. Available, verified, accessible beneficial ownership registers in jurisdictions that harbour proceeds of crime would impede capital flight away from origin countries. Better regulation of enablers of corruption such as lawyers, accountants and real-estate agents would further restrict the ability of corrupt actors to operate with impunity using regulatory loopholes.

Let me also focus on the issue of participation and compensation of victims in the process of international asset recovery, in instances where such recovery is actually occurring. With a few exceptions, the recorded cases of international asset recovery pay very little heed to this issue.

Often, and especially in the enforcement of foreign bribery cases, one finds that victims of corruption are sidelined for ostensible reasons such as the inability to quantify the harm caused, or the inability to identify victims. Such cases end up enriching destination states, with no tangible justice achieved for the victims of such corruption.

Recognising the challenges faced by victims in origin countries in terms of access to justice, access to information and access to resources, we call upon this community of states to pay particular attention to including a wide category of victims of corruption very early on in any enforcement process, as, not to do so is a grave lost opportunity for those most harmed by such corruption. While recognizing the challenges that exist, we also call upon States Parties wherever assets have flown, to recognize the particularly debilitating role they play in enabling corruption and to take proactive measures to take enforcement action with regards to proceeds of crime, without waiting for action to be instigated in origin countries. I conclude by reminding this conference, of a few of the Principles formulated at the Global Forum on Asset Recovery in 2017, where the importance of partnership, mutual interests, early dialogue, transparency and accountability, benefiting the victims of corruption and of inclusion of non-government stakeholders was underlined. While these are not agreed international standards, they constitute a specific application of the UNCAC Article 9(2) obligation of States Parties to take appropriate measures to promote transparency and accountability in the management of public finances, as well as other UNCAC provisions.

We look forward to heightened focus on international co-operation in asset recovery, specifically with respect to supporting developing nations, in this fight against corruption.