

Factsheet 2

Corruption as major threat to economic and social development across the world to be discussed in Panama

The Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in Panama City (25-29 November 2013)

PANAMA CITY/VIENNA, 25 November (UN Information Service) – More than 1,200 participants are expected in Panama later this month for the world's largest anti-corruption gathering. The Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties (COSP5) to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) will be held in Panama City, Panama from 25-29 November 2013.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption, which was adopted ten years ago, is the only legally binding universal anti-corruption instrument. Every two years the States Parties to the Convention meet to review implementation of the Convention and discuss how States can better tackle corruption. So far more than 20 Government Ministers, as well as representatives from inter-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and the media are expected to attend.

One of the topics under discussion will be the importance of good governance based on the rule of law to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to establish the post-2015 development agenda. The Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Yury Fedotov said: "There has been a growing realization that corruption and lack of good governance have hindered progress in attaining the MDGs. We must make it clear that accountability and transparency are fundamental building blocks for achieving sustainable development."

The UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)

The United Nations Convention against Corruption came into force in December 2005 and has been ratified by 168 States, more than four fifths of the United Nations Member States. The legally-binding Convention obliges States to prevent and criminalize corruption; to promote international cooperation; to recover stolen assets; and to improve technical assistance and information exchange in both the private and public sectors.

Preventing Corruption

An entire chapter of the Convention is dedicated to preventing corruption with measures directed at both the public and private sectors. These include model preventive policies, such as the establishment of anticorruption bodies and enhanced transparency in the financing of election campaigns and political parties. States must ensure that their public services are subject to safeguards that promote efficient, transparent recruitment based on merit. Public servants once recruited should be subject to codes of conduct, requirements for financial and other disclosures and appropriate disciplinary measures. Transparency and accountability in matters of public finance must also be promoted and specific requirements are set up for preventing corruption in critical areas of the public sector such as the judiciary and public procurement. Preventing corruption also requires the involvement of civil society including non-governmental and community-based organizations.

Criminalization of corruption

The Convention requires countries to establish criminal and other offences to cover a wide range of acts of corruption, if these are not already crimes under domestic law. The Convention goes beyond previous instruments of this kind, criminalizing not only basic forms of corruption such as bribery and the embezzlement of public funds, but also trading in influence and the concealment and laundering of the proceeds of corruption. Private sector corruption is also covered as are money-laundering and obstructing justice.

International cooperation

Countries agreed to cooperate with one another in every aspect of the fight against corruption, including prevention, investigation and the prosecution of offenders. Countries are bound by the Convention to render specific forms of mutual legal assistance in gathering and transferring evidence for use in court, and to extradite offenders. Countries are also required to undertake measures which will support the tracing, freezing, seizure and confiscation of the proceeds of corruption.

Asset recovery

Asset recovery is a fundamental principle of the Convention. This is a particularly important issue for many developing countries where high-level corruption has plundered the national wealth and where resources are badly needed for reconstruction and the rehabilitation of societies.

In the case of the embezzlement of public funds, the confiscated property would be returned to the State requesting it; in the case of proceeds of any other offence covered by the Convention, the property would be returned providing the proof of ownership or recognition of the damage caused to a requesting States; in all other cases, priority consideration would be given to the return of the confiscated property to the requesting State, to the return of such property to the prior legitimate owners or to compensation of the victims.

Implementation Review Mechanism

UNCAC has gone further than any other UN Convention by being endowed with the landmark Implementation Review Mechanism, which is now in its fourth year of operation and has already led to actual measurable results. UNODC has trained more than 1,400 anti-corruption practitioners from across the globe and provided assistance to 35 States to amend their legislation. The peer reviews identify good practices and challenges in national anti-corruption laws and practices and the executive summaries once finalized, are published.

Other events in Panama City

There are a range of special events taking place in Panama City on various topics including match-fixing and corruption in sports; safeguarding against corruption in the context of sporting and other major public events; the role of global banks in delivering anti-corruption initiatives; preventing corruption in public procurement systems; anti-corruption and the post 2015 development agenda; the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Building Integrity Programme in defence; Institutional Integrity Initiative: the UNCAC as applied to the UN system; and the human rights case against corruption.

UNODC's action against corruption

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) supports States in the implementation of the UNCAC and provides technical assistance and training. UNODC has a web-based anti-corruption portal known as TRACK (Tools and Resources for Anti-Corruption Knowledge) which includes an electronic database of relevant legislation and jurisprudence. It has established a partnership with the World Bank Group under the joint Stolen Assets Recovery (StAR) Initiative which aims to facilitate systematic and timely recovery of assets stolen through acts of corruption. UNODC also carries out corruption/integrity surveys and actively contributes to the implementation of the 10th principle of the United Nations Global Compact, which states that "Business should work against corruption in any form, including bribery and extortion".

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Conference website of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/CAC-COSP-session5.html>

Conference website of the Host Country: <http://cospvpanama.com/eng/index-e.html>

For further information visit:

http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/events/2013/cosp5_panama_2013.html

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