

Press Release

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Global anti-corruption treaty risks falling at first hurdle

For immediate release

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A ground-breaking global treaty to reduce corruption risks falling at the first hurdle during a critical intergovernmental conference this week, say anti-corruption campaigners.

The meeting should have agreed a way for the international community to track whether governments are actually putting their anti-corruption promises into practice – without which the ground-breaking UN Convention against Corruption will be toothless. But as the week-long meeting drew to a close today, governments had agreed on little more than the setting up of committees to discuss potential monitoring mechanisms over the next year.

“The postponement of major decisions on the implementation of the convention to December next year is a huge disappointment. Failure to turn words into action would be a betrayal of the millions of people around the world who remain in poverty largely because of the devastating effects of corruption on their countries”, said Vincent Tan of the Transparency and Accountability Network, an anti-corruption campaigner who attended the meeting from the Philippines.

The World Bank estimates that US \$1 trillion is paid in bribes and a similar amount is laundered in financial centers every year.

The convention, which was signed in 2003 and came into force in December 2005, provides a legal framework which outlaws bribery worldwide, makes it easier for countries to recover state assets that have been laundered overseas, and compels signatory countries to prevent corruption and bribery at home.

However, the original negotiations for the treaty, which went on for two years, could not agree on a way to monitor whether governments were putting their promises into action. The decision on whether such oversight was even necessary was postponed until this week’s meeting.

“It’s good that governments have recognized that they do need some means of telling whether something is being done. But it would be a severe blow to the fight against corruption if that were to be the only result of this meeting.” said Gillian Dell of Transparency International. “We need to see firm action on monitoring in the next year so that we start to breathe life into UNCAC” she added.

Campaigners including Oxfam and Transparency International have called for a monitoring system that will measure government efforts to combat bribery and embezzlement. They are also demanding that governments protect whistleblowers, who are regularly victimized for exposing corruption.

Anti-corruption conventions have already been introduced by the African Union, the OECD and the Organisation of American States, but the UN convention is the first agreement to be adopted worldwide. 140 states have signed and 80 countries have ratified the convention to date.

Notes for Editors

1. Government ministers and senior officials from 90 countries have been debating the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption at the first Conference of States Parties at the Dead Sea, Jordan from 10-14 December 2006
2. The next Conference of State Parties will be held in Indonesia in December 2007.
3. The Civil Society Friends of UNCAC is a coalition of over 40 non-governmental organizations from 30 countries who are committed to the full implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.