

## Results of pilot study on bribery released

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — A pilot study on bribery in Jordan revealed that 72.3 per cent of Jordanians do not think the government is serious in combating bribery.

The survey of 327 people from different sectors and age groups, conducted by Transparency International (TI) and the Arab Archive Institute, also revealed Tuesday that 59.6 per cent of respondents believe bribery will increase next year.

An initial reading of the study shows that bribery exists in the Kingdom and that a large number of people have been exposed to it, TI representative in Jordan Bassem Sakijha said.

Fifty per cent of those sampled said they had in fact made a bribe in one form or another.

According to the study, 93.5 per cent of respondents believe that bribery is a form of corruption. Meanwhile, 29.4 per cent said the phenomenon existed in Jordan to a large extent, 33.9 per cent said it existed to a medium extent and 31.2 per cent said it existed to a little small extent.

The pilot study also revealed that 11 per cent of respondents said they were informed of the need for a bribe (or exposed to the process) by those who asked for money, while 41 per cent said they were aware of bribes through “other sources” or mediators, and 8.4 per cent said they had offered to pay money by themselves.

When asked about the amount of the bribe paid, 17 per cent of respondents said it was JD5, another 17 per cent said they paid between JD10-20, 11 per cent said they paid between JD21-50 and 8 per cent said they paid more.

Of those sampled 24.8 per cent said they paid a bribe to “facilitate or accelerate a sound legal document,” while 5.5 per cent said the bribe was to facilitate an illegal document.

Out of those sampled, 28.5 per cent said the documents would have been passed without paying the bribe, while 23.8 per cent said it would not.

But when asked why those who receive bribes do it, slightly more than half, or 52 per cent of the respondents, said they believe those who take bribes do it to feed their families, while 35 per cent said they do it to become rich.

Sakijha noted that one of the main reasons for the growing percentage of small bribes specifically, is the prevalent bureaucracy within the public sector and the fact that public employees are underpaid and need to improve their living standards.

“The entire public sector needs to be reformed in order to ease the bureaucracy that is rampant and public employees should have their salaries improved in order not to have to accept bribes,” Sakijha said.

He added that the mentality of condoning a bribe, no matter how small the amount, should be changed and that public awareness of the fact that bribery is a form of corruption and a crime that is punishable by law should be developed.

According to the study, which was also supported by the Dutch embassy, more than half — 59.6 per cent — of respondents believe bribery will increase next year.

The study, the first of many others specialised on bribery with a focus on each sector, was unveiled at the beginning of a conference organised by TI to promote the ratification and effective implementation of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in the Middle East and North Africa region.

In remarks during the conference, Minister of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs Sabri Rbeihat said the government was moving ahead with the anti-corruption law and other legislation tackling the growing phenomenon.

He said, however, that this political desire should also be entwined with public awareness and a matching public drive towards eliminating corruption within all its forms.

The conference, the first follow-up to the “Platform for Action” agenda presented in November 2005, focused on the overall status of UNCAC in the region and examined concrete steps to promote its ratification.

Conference organisers expressed hope that the meeting would help create greater public awareness in the Kingdom and the region on the importance of such a convention and how to implement its articles and adapt it to local legislation.

It is also seen as an important meeting, which will help garner greater public support to push for Arab parliaments' ratification of the convention.

The convention enlists the commitment of all countries to criminalise bribery and other forms of corruption, establish national institutions to prevent its occurrence, pursue the perpetrators, cooperate with each other to recuperate embezzled funds and lend one another technical and financial assistance in order to combat corruption, foster integrity and end impunity.

The signature and ratification of the UNCAC is regarded as a positive and responsible step forward and a political decision worthy of support. TI officials say signing and ratifying the convention testifies to a country's credibility, to its respect for commitments, and to the image it wishes to project of itself and its institutions.

According to a TI press release, 133 countries have signed the UNCAC so far, but only 35 have ratified it.

Five MENA countries — Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya and Syria — have reportedly ratified the UNCAC.

But according to Sakijha, the convention has not yet been ratified by the Jordanian Parliament. Therefore, he said, the convention, the implementation of which is greatly needed to help combat corruption, remains an idle document.

“Governments hear civil society call for greater transparency in the Arab world and are undertaking promising measures to implement these calls for change. But the measures often fall short of substantive changes,” TI Chairwoman Huguette Labelle said in a press release.

“Citizens throughout the Arab world often lack a voice to recount experiences of bribery and extortion that affect their lives and deprive them of education and health services. Ratification of the UN Convention against corruption gives them this much needed voice.”

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