

# **Opening Remarks 2008 Integrity Awards Ceremony**

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*As prepared for delivery*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening and thank you all for joining us at what has become Transparency International's annual celebration of those who make extraordinary efforts and cross barriers, to confront corruption. Tonight we honour two individuals, two journalists, whose work reflects the complexity of corruption today and of the challenges we must tackle.

Why do we fight corruption? For the very reasons that the work of David Leigh and Roman Shleynov, so powerfully demonstrates: because poor governance and corruption, bribes and nepotism, have been undermining the best efforts to fight poverty, to improve access to basic services and to establish responsive government - in short, to improve quality of life for people around the world.

I look at David and Roman and I see an immense resource: Two journalists of conviction, of integrity, who –through their work- have dedicated themselves to a relentless pursuit of the truth about those that propel and permit corruption. They have navigated through murky waters and investigated powerful forces to penetrate secret webs, expose failed accountability and show how corruption diminishes the functioning of our societies.

It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword. Yet the ability to use the pen and the idea that information and communication surpasses violent means of seeking change, can only take effect through the right to freedom of expression. Sometimes, investigative

journalists like David and Roman, test a state's tolerance for the crucial right to access information and to publish the results. It is journalists like David and Roman who delve into records and facts, seek out sources, verify information and allow us to understand how corruption distorts decision-making and undermines citizen's trust in those officials and systems mean to protect them from the manipulation and abuse of power.

Article 19 of the of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects citizens' right to express themselves freely, to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. Sadly, this right is infringed upon through questionable legislation, censorship, harassment, threats and even death. The Committee to Protect Journalists estimates that from 722 journalists killed in direct reprisal for their work since 1992, 20.3 per cent were reporting on corruption.

It is no coincidence that since being launched nine years ago, the Integrity Awards have gone to six journalists from different countries. Three of these were posthumous tributes. They were not free to expose corruption.

A free press speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves. Journalists become the eyes, ears and voice of victims of corruption. As such, we rely on them to seek accountability, stop perpetrators from acting with impunity and to promote the transparency that empowers citizens to make informed decisions.

Transparency International has worked with and relied on the media since its inception in 1993. Our organisation does not investigate individual cases, but relies on the media to expose the realities of corruption around the world. We use this information to successfully campaign to put transparency, good governance and the fight against corruption at the centre of the global agenda. It is those individual stories that illustrate entrenched corrupt practices and cause outrage beyond those affected. Through them, we become witness to the egregious absence of integrity in countries rich and poor – and are inspired to do something about it – to fight corruption.

Everyone agrees that corruption is bad but it is not always easy to find the best way to counter it, to understand why it should be fought and with what means. Many are simply discouraged and think that there is no remedy. Some are resigned to paying the bribes, big and small. Others are convinced that out-bribing the next company is the best way to do business. Meanwhile, it is our societies that pay the cost: the cost in lost opportunities, in shoddy construction, in poor or non-existent services, in lost faith in the future, in lack of justice and trust.

Tonight we see that it is possible for individuals to give meaning to the words transparency and accountability, to make these issues a central part of their work and open a path for whistleblowers and advocates to make a strong case for stopping corruption. David and Roman have countered entrenched corruption with entrenched integrity. Tonight is a victory for Integrity and we thank them both for being here.

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