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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFREI8Ej9ss>  
(In Russian only)

Mr. President, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour to speak here today. It is also a great responsibility to speak here today, because I represent not only the Russian-US Joint Working Group on Investment and Institutional Integrity, my organisation Transparency International–Russia, and myself, but also all Russian civil society organisations that promote transparency and accountability and fight against corruption.

I wish I did not have to use the ugly word “corruption” on such a lovely summer day. But I must do so, as this word is closely linked to many of the problems my colleagues discussed at the civil society summit and at a meeting of Russian and American businesspeople. These problems are found in diverse areas such as healthcare, education, community development, media and business development, investment and human rights.

Unfortunately, we have only recently begun to fully realize that the fight for transparency and the fight against corruption is, in fact, a fight for human rights.

Why? Because corruption and a lack of transparency threaten the protection of human rights. Corruption makes countries and their peoples vulnerable to internal and external challenges and threatens their national security. Corruption and lack of transparency distort the very essence and sense of democracy, public administration and proprietorship.

Unfortunately, in recent decades Russians and Americans, as well as people of other nations, somehow managed to forget this, and became accustomed to intentional omissions and double standards, putting pragmatism and consumption before all else. Yes, we constructed institutions, wrote laws, codes of government and corporate ethics, we passed resolutions and conventions. But all this has not protected the nations of the world from financial or economic crisis, nor from the growth of corruption, which is part of almost all aspects of our lives. It seems that we are currently caught in a values vacuum, where neither traditional institutions nor traditional instruments can cope with the powerful forces of the enemy, whose name is Greed, Lies, and the Willingness to Engage in Illegal Enrichment.

What can we do to change that? On the one hand, the answer is very simple, but at the same time it is also very complicated, as often are the majority of simple, but forgotten truths. We must fight corruption, financial impurity and lack of transparency with truth. I do not mean truth as an abstract value, but rather truth as an instrument of our national development plans and as an

instrument of our bilateral relations. This truth should be part of the intercommunication between society and government, government and business, and business and their consumers.

The new age and reality do not give us any other choice but to learn to call things by their real name. We must stop our habit of confusing pragmatism with efficiency. We are often told that the principles of business cannot be changed, that businesses will always try to earn a profit at any cost. We are often told that it is impossible to change the essence of bureaucracy and that a bureaucrat will always try to receive an administrative rent. We are often told that we cannot defeat corruption because it is in our mentality or in our culture.

I absolutely disagree with these statements. I am certain that we can change bureaucracy and corruption. I am absolutely convinced that there are no nations simply doomed to be corrupt. I would like to clearly state that those who spread myths about the invincibility of corruption simply do not want such a victory to occur. Such people feel more comfortable in the world of semi-truth and shadow schemes, in a world where everything can be bought and sold and where any “problem” can be solved behind closed doors. Those who say that it is unnecessary and useless to fight corruption do so because they fear the demystification of corruption. They fear that corruption will cease to be seen by society as a kind of cultural historical phenomenon, but instead for what it really is—the specific actions of specific people.

Doctor Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Laureate, once said that it is natural for businesses to exist to make a profit, but also to change the world for the better. It seems to me that this is also true of politics, public administration and international relations. The president of Russia recently said that we must make corruption indecent. This cannot be argued with. You know, my grandma who certainly was neither a president nor a Nobel Laureate, taught me to tell good from bad by repeating the phrase “all that is hidden will one day come to light”. Unfortunately, such a simple lesson is not taken into consideration anymore. But such a lesson still has meaning today. Sooner or later, all things do come to light: secret deals, financial gerrymandering and much more. And when such deeds are uncovered, it often does not affect the people directly involved as much as it affects the country, its reputation, investors’ trust, and society’s trust in government.

This is exactly why it seems to me that corruption must become not only indecent, but totally unacceptable. Both the Russian and American governments must introduce a zero tolerance corruption policy as an absolute principle of their institutional, legal, political, business and daily

life, and call upon all other G8 countries to agree to such a policy at the forthcoming G8 Summit in Italy.

Today there are many more factors uniting Russia and the USA than may seem at first glance. Both Russian and American presidents began their terms by making transparency a priority of their respective administrations, and have undertaken legislative and administrative initiatives to ensure transparency. Both the Russian and American people want the same things from their governments: more accountability and transparency. Russian and American experts, businessmen and human rights activists meeting in Moscow today speak of common problems, and confirm that transparency is a pressing concern, that we need transparency just as we need air and that we are ready to continue our everyday efforts to fight corruption together.

We won't be able to overcome the crisis, strengthen our countries, or build stable and friendly political and economic bilateral relations if we only attempt to repair what is broken. We must find common value benchmarks and agree upon a common language of truth. In the absence of such common values, neither investments, nor civil or interstate dialogue will function properly. Without these values we will be unable to improve the quality of life in our countries and in the world, which could then be a matter of pride for our children. And the pride of our grandmothers, who oversee us from above.