

Foreword

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The human rights community needs to pay even more attention to corruption.

The highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being, incorporated in article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Corruption – alongside poverty, inequity, civil conflict, discrimination and violence – is a major issue that has not been adequately addressed within the framework of these basic rights. It leads to the skewing of health spending priorities and the leaching of health budgets, resulting in the neglect of diseases and those communities affected by them; it also means that poor people often decide against life-saving treatment, because they cannot afford the fees charged for health services that should be free.

Corruption in the health sector affects people all over the world, as the essays featured in the *Global Corruption Report 2006* reflect. Money that should be spent on alleviating poverty and illness ends up instead in private pockets. In this way, corruption literally violates human rights, as people are denied the care that their governments are obliged to provide.

But while the concern is global, there are populations for whom the consequences of ill health are particularly bleak. If corruption and a lack of transparency are not addressed as integral to health care strategies, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases threaten to reverse hard-won development gains, especially in Africa. In many of these countries, it is women who suffer most through discrimination in service provision, and because they lack the capacity to access adequate health care or to act upon prevention information.

Central to a human rights approach to health is ensuring that essential medicines are available, accessible and of good quality. Availability means that these drugs must be on offer in sufficient quantity within countries where there is a need for them. Accessibility means that they should be easily obtainable on a non-discriminatory basis to those who require them. Good quality signifies that the drugs have to be scientifically and medically approved.

Corruption hampers compliance with each of these obligations. The unpredictability of disease, coupled with opaque spending decisions and aggressive marketing practices by medicines producers and suppliers, generate ample opportunities for corruption. This affects the quality of medicines, for example, when regulators are bribed to exercise less than rigorous checks or hospital administrators purchase cheaper, less effective drugs and embezzle the proceeds. The consequences may be further reaching

than failure to treat today's patients: the use of poor-quality medicines stimulates drug-resistant strains of killers such as malaria.

The *Global Corruption Report 2006* unpacks the issues related to corruption and health, that as members of governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society, we need to take into account if we are serious about safeguarding the right to health. The challenge is immense, and can only be tackled if we work together, making use of the moral and legal arguments provided by the international human rights framework, as well as the practical tools and strategies, many of which are highlighted in this book, that are needed to address the problems associated with ill health around the world effectively.

There is a particular urgency about the issues in this 2006 report. For the years up to 2015 we will see a steep increase in the aid budgets of donor countries, and much of this aid will go to support health areas in developing countries. Unless we improve donor coherence, transparency and the willingness of developing countries to have rigorous systems of accountability, we could see corruption becoming more of a problem, and miss out on an important opportunity to strengthen primary health care systems.

This book should be on the table of every policy-maker who cares about development.

Note

1. Mary Robinson is former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Ireland. She is the founder and president of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative.