

*Huguette Labelle
Chair*

Transparency International

International Anti-Corruption Day

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Ladies and gentlemen, Ambassador Espinosa:

It is a pleasure for me to address you on such a special occasion as today. It is a moment, a space to reflect on and take into account the road travelled thus far and the paths to follow in the arduous journey of the fight against corruption.

Today we celebrate the fact that since Transparency International's founding sixteen years ago, we have gone from a world in which the word corruption was not even whispered, to a world in which preventing corruption has become an anchor for good government programmes. It is no coincidence that such programmes give increasing priority to transparency and accountability.

Since our work began, Transparency International has focused on raising awareness, carrying out research to diagnose the problem in its various forms, and proposed measures that lead to structural change. Such reforms are necessary in government as well as in the private sector in order to effectively prevent this crime and sanction corruption once it happens.

To reach such ambitious goals, we must count on people like you – professionals devoted to a prioritised implementation of anti-corruption policies. Our collaboration has been essential for the achievements in the last years. My own experience in public service for 19 years, namely as deputy minister in the Canadian government, reminds me that our task, and particularly the public sector role, is a complex challenge of major proportions.

Fighting corruption means, in some cases, a trade-off between political costs and social achievements. It requires conviction and the rejection of abuse of power. We all know major changes do not happen overnight. But the benefits are so numerous that we have an obligation to try. Together civil society, and the private sector together with governments, could change the entrenched practices that limit productivity, efficiency and ultimately, the progress of our societies.

This journey is not one limited to developing countries and is not exclusive to the public sector. We must remember that Mexico hosted the signing of the United Nations against Corruption –we thank Ambassador Espinosa, our host today, for her special efforts and support in this regard. Mexico is also party to the Inter American Convention against Corruption as well as the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. It is clear that Mexico’s political commitment at regional and international levels has been firm.

Similarly, the country has approved and is in the process of implementing an exemplary access to information law and has innovative e-government and public procurement initiatives. Currently, Transparencia México is monitoring some 20 large public bids. Such measures help increase transparency in the management of public funds –a historical change. But Mexico, as we all know, is also affected by unyielding crime, in some cases with a high degree of infiltration of its public institutions.

Therefore, we are facing a case in which achievements are being challenged by those who are unwilling to give up the vast personal benefits supplied by corruption. In that sense, Mexico’s reality reflects to a great extent what is happening in the rest of the world.

Mexico is among the most important economies in the region and together with Brazil, India and Russia, it should become a standard bearer in the fight against corruption. These countries have been shocked by scandals related to impunity, improper payments, political corruption and state capture. But the potential of each of these nations and some steps already taken provide encouraging promises.

Mexican companies are currently moving beyond the region to compete in international markets. This type of expansion in Mexico’s participation within the global economy implies as well major responsibilities to regulate private sector practices. In the area of climate change –an increasingly urgent issue to address- it is encouraging to see Mexico’s proposal for a Global Green Fund as a potential funding mechanism to counter this environmental

problem. Along with this type of initiative, we expect that Mexico will assume a leadership role to ensure that any mechanism agreed during the Copenhagen Conference currently under way, will prioritise the need for transparent funding to contain climate change.

When most of the countries ranked in our Index score lower than five, it is clear that corruption is an undeniable challenge. The Group of 20 has adopted strong commitments to guarantee that integrity and transparency become the pillars of a new regulatory framework. As the G20 adopts economic and financial sector reforms, it is essential to address corruption as a significant threat to a sustainable economic future. The G20 should keep its commitment to seek public support to key reforms, ensuring that institutions like the Financial Stability Board and decisions on infrastructure investment include transparency and civil society input. As part of this group, Mexico has a role in representing the interests of emerging economies greatly affected by a crisis now in the process of recovery.

Despite different contexts in each country, the general effects of the global financial crisis and the subsequent economic slowdown highlight the fundamental significance of governance in the public and private sector, as well as the links between them. It is particularly vital that stimulus packages already injecting huge amounts of money into affected economies be subjected to controls that guarantee management with transparency and integrity. We hope Mexico joins this call and activates its capacity to help guide international policy in this area.

The credibility of countries depends mostly not on short term successes without deep consequences or fundamental changes, but rather on concrete efforts strongly rooted in an anti-corruption plan and legislation integrated from the highest levels to the smallest municipalities. It is essential that regardless of government levels or locations, an entire country, and not only symbolic select areas, participate in and support the approval and implementation of laws and regulations that help to restore citizens' trust. Citizens will then know they can rely on a government that respects and supports their rights to live and develop with dignity.

Preventing corruption efficiently requires a well-functioning judicial system and a public financial system free of corrupt practices, with transparency in the flow of funds –revenues and disbursements. It is essential that this be accompanied by regulatory agencies and supreme auditors who operate independently, professionally and with adequate resources. In order for this to be successful, there is a need for specialists with advanced expertise in the investigation and prosecution of such crimes. This is vital because those who attempt to capture the state through bribes and other corrupt practices often rely on the assistance of sophisticated systems and facilitators.

Nationally and globally, oversight institutions and legal frameworks that are actually enforced, coupled with smarter, more effective regulation, will ensure lower levels of corruption. This will lead to a much needed increase of trust in public institutions, sustained economic growth and more effective development assistance.

When corruption goes unchecked, the corrupt end up taking control of our lives. Its magnitude cannot be underestimated. Corruption feeds poverty, seeds violence, distorts markets, destabilises countries and in many cases, corruption kills.

The path is a difficult one. Nonetheless, we count on the promising seeds of international conventions signed by Mexico and other national achievements to bear fruit in the long term and that we can rely on vigorous international leadership by those who have personally suffered the high cost of corruption.

Thank you.

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