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Integrity: Antidote to Corruption

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Good Afternoon, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

First let me thank the Integrity and Human Rights Conference for giving me the opportunity to speak here today, with special thank yous to Leila de Lima and Loida Lewis whose impressive work continues to make this such an important, high profile forum. I am honoured to share the stage with so many distinguished speakers and with the candidates in this year's presidential elections.

Perhaps in an election season, it is not that surprising to see the candidates for high office on this platform to talk about Integrity-- and Human Rights. There can be **no** arguments against Integrity: it is a quality that all politicians would like to see mentioned in the same breath as their names. Clearly it is the bedrock on which good governance is built. It is why when my organisation, Transparency International, defined a framework to evaluate how well a government provides for the basic rights of its citizens we called it the National *Integrity* System – When we illustrate this, we show a building, much like a classical Greek temple, with the pillars representing the different branches of society – the judiciary, --the executive, -- the press, -- the police, for example. If the Integrity of **any** of the pillars is weak, the whole architecture of state starts to crumble.

Politics and Integrity should go hand in hand. When we conducted a National Integrity System study of the Philippines in 2006 we made a series of recommendations that hold true today, both here in the Philippines and all round the world. In a country with *institutionalized* corruption, integrity pillars themselves are continually compromised. According to the report, Collusion, State capture, and leadership incapable of crushing vested interests are all areas that still need to be addressed. Clearly a government that is founded on integrity needs to adopt policies that have zero tolerance for corruption. There should be no nepotism in appointments and a clear will to prosecute all those found guilty of corruption, *including* the well-known and powerful. Too often it is the small fry who is targeted, for obvious reasons.

To hear the candidates speak this morning, it would appear that they **understand** the message. But words and commitments, as we know, are only a first step. Whoever is elected president in May, will have to follow through – they will have to act on their words. I applaud this conference for focussing the campaign agenda on the need to ensure that Integrity and Human Rights remain centre stage.

I'll return to this idea of national integrity a little later, but first I would like to take a few moments to talk about the fundamental ideas around the topic I have been asked to address today. --Integrity: an Antidote to Corruption, and its resonance for this audience – particularly young people and the media – and with me personally.

When I first began thinking about this speech I asked myself how I could talk on a topic that is in fact a truism. It's like saying honesty is good, or corruption is bad. Of course, integrity is the antidote to corruption – if people always acted with integrity, there would be no corruption. There would be no need to eradicate this *pernicious, borderless* disease, which attacks all populations but so often disproportionately disadvantages the poor.

I thought: if only all diseases had tried and true antidotes.

If corruption were like a snake-bite, one dose in time and the venom is neutralised.

If tackling corruption was just a matter of administering an integrity vaccine. You could then protect all children at birth, and call them back for a booster as they enter adulthood and are faced with difficult decisions that may cause them to ignore their own internal moral compasses.

If only it were that easy.

I then remembered a speech that Huguette Labelle, the Chair of Transparency International gave a few years ago at Oxford University to the World Ethics Forum. It went right to the heart of the matter. The speech was called Cultivating Entrenched Integrity.

Integrity is not something that can be administered but something that must come from within; it must be inherent, and if it isn't inherent it must be learned. That optimistic implication – that integrity can be learned – is what gives me hope. Huguette Labelle made the following challenging observation:

“For although our understanding has advanced, we see vexing shortfalls in integrity in many places, whether as spectacles of corporate greed or embedded networks co-opting government resources for personal gain. In short, we are the battle against corruption. The battle for integrity remains to be won. Corruption across the globe appears today as great and as grave a threat as ever.

It is this idea of entrenched integrity that is so important and Huguette Labelle is right: it is a battle: a battle that has to be won preferably first in homes and in schools, and then re-fought again and again on the wider grown-up stage in both the public and private sectors.

But, how do you teach that? How do you make sure that children and young people have a strong moral compass – even when no one is watching?

The first step in the process is clear: children learn everything by example. -- That is why youth role models in the home and in school are so important. But it seems that in our society today, the kind of role models that stand for Integrity are lacking. Our sports heroes routinely come up wanting, our politicians rarely project the kind of image children can look up to. We clearly lack an abundance of Nelson Mandelas on the world stage.

A recent poll conducted for The Children's Society's National Mentoring Initiative – a children's charity in the United Kingdom -- found that only 20 percent of respondents – one in five people over the age of 18 -- believe that children have appropriate adults to look up to and learn from. The head of the society made a very important point. If children are not looking up to adults -- this is not the children's fault. Parents and society have a **responsibility** to live by the values that they espouse, and be *strong* and *positive* role models for the young.

I second that sentiment: cultivating entrenched social norms must start when children are young. As a group, young people are a sizeable force in their communities and societies. In 2007 nearly one fifth of the world's population was between 15 and 24, with most living in developing countries. Educating a new generation in the values of honesty, fairness and concern for the common good is one of the most powerful ways of ensuring a future where corrupt practices are **not** part of the normal way of life.

Unfortunately, so often the next generation receives the wrong message.

I used to teach English at a prestigious University in China. Many of the children there were the sons and daughters of business leaders and politicians. Like all children, some were better students than others. When it came time to write the report cards I graded honestly, despite the fact that I had been told certain students could not score lower than a B, and that my job was on the line. Despite grading fairly, by the time those grades reached the report cards, those students all scored Bs but I kept my job. Someone else had changed the grades.

But what lesson is this generation learning? These students will graduate and enter the job market thinking merit has no value and success can be bought with influence. -- By distorting the truth, -we do these young people and our society a *great* disservice. First they will never learn that you have to work to

achieve, and second, they see that the system is corruptible. - You **don't** need Integrity to get what you want.

This example shows how parents can use wealth and influence in the mistaken perception that they are benefitting their children. But it is often the system itself that profits from a lack of integrity and disadvantages children. Transparency International is publishing a report, coincidentally today, that assesses primary education in seven African countries. It specifically sought to identify where corruption hurts the system. In all these countries primary school is by law free. Despite this, many parents reported that they are asked to pay fees. In many cases, these illegal fees are hard to come by and could be the difference between sending a child to school and putting food for the family on the table.

Here we see *where* corruption collides with human rights: it is a human right for children to receive an education; the state says it will provide the education free; those employed by the state to deliver this human right abuse their position, seek private gain and thereby hurt the poor. Lack of integrity here leads to corruption, which in turn denies children their rights.

Again, I ask, what lessons are children going to learn from that? How are they going to view the organs of the state, the government that is supposed to support them?

As I said before, Integrity, like corruption is learned, which is why it is so important to give the right messages from the start. Often corruption in society is tolerated because it has been tolerated for generations. Perhaps it is even institutionalised. It is this cycle that has to be changed, despite the fact that older generations may have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

In many areas youth are more open to change and possess the courage and vitality that can bring about that change. At Transparency International, it is one of our key priorities going forward to help young people understand that fighting corruption means learning integrity. Since our work began we have

focused on raising awareness, carrying out research to diagnose the problem and then proposing measures that lead to structural changes. This approach can work in sensitising the next generation to challenge all forms of institutionalised corruption.

I go back again to the speech given by Huguette Labelle. She hit on a very important point. Young people have to understand that it is their values that will shape the future. I quote:

We must seek to shape the values of generations to come, through civic education and the free flow of information, with a focus on knowledge, skills and attitudes. We must succeed in communicating a sense of ownership to young adults as they come of age, ownership of the institutions of governance in their respective countries, ownership of the right to question and demand accountability from their leaders.

Clearly the integrity of young people is put to the test early. At Transparency International we compile an annual Global Corruption Barometer. This involves surveying more than 76,000 people in 69 countries. We ask them questions about their faith in government, their perceptions of corruption, and, whether they have paid any bribes in the past 12 months.

In 2009 16 per cent of people under 30 said they had paid a bribe of some sort – to reiterate: one in every six young people had paid a bribe.

I would like to think that **if** we added a question to the next corruption barometer survey asking how many people refused to pay a bribe, the results would give us more reason to be optimistic; -- perhaps for every one in six young people who pay a bribe, there are many, many more who refuse.

I recently read of a local government initiative in Indonesia that is putting this theory to the test, in a slightly different way.

Last year a new type of café started to appear around schools in Samarinda in Borneo. They are called Honesty Cafes, they sell the usual food and drink but it is up to customers to pay the right amount in a dish by the door. The idea, which is part of a local government strategy to combat endemic corruption, is quite simple: give people a clear choice and you teach them a lesson: they can be honest or they can cheat – it's up to them. By all accounts far more young people pay up than steal.

I am, as I have said before, an optimist and stories like this give me hope.

When Transparency International started 16 years ago, corruption was far from the top of the world agenda. It was overlooked as a barrier to growth or worse still, accepted as business-as-usual, something you just had to live with. Today corruption is widely accepted as one of the greatest impediments to development, particularly in the developing world. The World Bank puts a \$1.6 trillion price tag on the damaging effects of corruption; governments sign up to international conventions to prevent it; politicians make tackling it a national priority – as we have heard today.

At TI we see this at all levels as we promote the enforcement of conventions like the United Nations Convention against Corruption which today has 140 signatories or the United Nations Global Compact which compels the more than 7,000 organisations and businesses who sign up to it to uphold 10 principles including anti-corruption and human rights. We see people scrambling to get on the anti-corruption bandwagon that we helped start. We watch as a proliferation of laws and protocols call for the elimination of corruption and impose sanctions against those who are corrupt.

As I said, I am an optimist, but I am also a pragmatist. We're back to the issue of words and commitments. Conventions and compacts raise awareness but, let's face it, words and commitments however eloquently they are delivered don't count for much without actions. That is why it is so important to enforce these anti-corruption covenants and conventions and make sure that the sticks are there to "encourage" the good behaviour.

Here both civil society and the press play an important monitoring role. And here we can see some of the best examples of integrity in action. If corrupt acts are exposed in the media and people are shamed or even face prosecution, it makes others think twice before doing the same thing. It is not surprising that countries that have a relatively free press with good access to information laws tend to score higher on our Corruptions Perception Index.

Exposing corruption takes a great deal of integrity and courage. Nine years ago we launched something called the Integrity Awards at TI. It is no coincidence that since then, the Integrity Awards have gone to six journalists from different countries. Three of these were posthumous tributes. These brave people were not free to expose corruption, but they had the integrity to try -- and they paid the ultimate price.

Here in the Philippines you have recently had a horrifying example of what it means to support the ideals of democracy: there was widespread mourning and condemnation after the killing of 57 people last November in the run up to the elections. 31 of those people were journalists and media workers just trying to do their jobs. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, since it started keeping statistics 12 years ago, 801 journalists have been killed just doing their job and 10 percent of these were killed because they were covering corruption – 80 lives lost This year already a further 5 journalists have been murdered.

We as citizens need a strong and free media to tell the stories of corruption in defiance of intimidation. We need them to hold governments and officials at all levels to account. We need them to spread the word that integrity matters. Public awareness is critical to nurture shared values and reinforce ethical behaviour.

The pressures, however, to turn a blind eye are real be it through government censorship and intimidation, or self-censorship for commercial reasons. The media survives on advertising – criticising the hand that feeds requires

courage and conviction, particularly when a job and a livelihood are on the line.

No one expects this to be easy, particularly in a system that has tried for decades to co-opt journalists, often successfully. The 1960s and 1970s were particularly difficult, by all accounts, in the Philippines. Old habits die hard and this so-called “envelopmental journalism” is particularly prevalent during the run up to elections. There is clearly an unwholesome alliance between the media and candidates that stretches the limits of integrity.

But journalists are our eyes and ears in places we cannot go. They are there to witness, to make sure that those tempted to act without integrity – that is give in to corruption -- don't, because there is someone always watching. To be effective, in both its role as spreading public awareness and in uncovering corruption, the media needs the freedom to act independently and the courage to report the truth.

Which brings me back to national integrity and the role of leadership. We had eight would-be leaders stand up here this morning and talk about the importance of integrity. Let us hope that whoever wins will stand by their words. At the end of the day, it is individuals who, in their daily roles, have the responsibility to decide whether or not to cross the line, to abuse entrusted power or not.

One conclusion, borne out time and again is that the political will for change is the most essential ingredient in a lasting campaign for greater public integrity. If those at the top do not truly want to tackle corruption, then how can they animate the rank and file? Worse yet, if they say one thing and do another, they only set a negative example, sanctioning greed and self-enrichment at the cost of the greater good.

Unfortunately this has happened too often here in the Philippines, which is why our Global Corruption Barometer in 2009 reports that those surveyed

said they strongly believed corruption affected their public officials and civil service. The Barometer asked 1,000 people to award grades to their civil servants. The average score was 4 out of 5, with 5 being extremely corrupt. And 77 percent said that the government's actions to counter corruption were ineffectual. Any new government has a tremendous challenge to win back the respect of the people. To do this they must tackle the institutionalisation of practices that are currently accepted but are, in a word, corrupt.

In conclusion I would like to go back to a point I made at the beginning. Integrity begins on a small stage – in homes and in our schools. Catch them when they are young and you have a greater chance to cultivate that entrenched sense of integrity that will always act as an antidote to corruption. In parallel with this, if leadership at the local and national level embraces integrity the message will continue to spread and spread more quickly. If, to give just one example, newly elected politicians make appointments based on merit and not because of family relationships or campaign contributions, people will start to learn that achievement, not who you know, pays.

As in all things, there has to be a plan B. Changing mores always takes time – it took Transparency International many years to push corruption up the global agenda -- so while the Integrity message is taking hold across society, we must bolster our efforts with other tools. As I mentioned earlier, countries across the globe are signing conventions and drafting legal frameworks that require commitments to integrity and zero tolerance for corruption. Some of these come armed with tough enforcement mechanisms – legal sticks, if you will. These are getting more robust by the year, thanks in part to pressure from civil society and the media. In the business world, several multinationals have fallen foul of the law and been fined hundreds of millions of dollars in the past year. I like to think of these sticks as integrity shots. Let's hope that they will act as an antidote to corruption, while we all work on cultivating entrenched integrity to eradicate the problem entirely.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to come here today. It has been my great pleasure and a great honour.

