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Opening Remarks

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Good morning, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Christiaan Poortman and I am Director of Global Programmes at Transparency International. It is a great honour for me to participate alongside so many distinguished guests at this inaugural panel of the First Central America and Dominican Republic Forum for Transparency.

First I would like to thank all those who have made this event happen. In particular the Government of El Salvador, the Secretary of Strategic Affairs and the Under Secretary of Transparency and Anti-corruption; the National Foundation for Development (FUNDE), our National Chapter in Formation here in El Salvador; the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, in addition to the Danish Cooperation in Central America, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, USAID, UNDP and GTZ of Germany. I thank you all for your dedication and efforts.

This Forum reflects what we at TI believe is the more effective way to fight corruption: a collaboration between all stakeholders who are dedicated not only to identifying the key causes and consequences of corruption, but also committed to creating spaces for dialogue and for setting up common strategies that allow us to reach our final goal: a world free of corruption.

TI has been working to create a corruption-free world now for 17 years and we know that corruption can be defeated. Although there are no magic formulas, several key elements need to be in place. Two of the most important, that I will talk about today, are **political will** and the need of **address the cost of fighting corruption**.

The starting point of the process that has gathered us here today was a forceful sign of political will. In 2006 the heads of states of Central American countries and the Dominican Republic signed the “Guatemala Declaration for a Corruption-Free Region.” The Guatemala Declaration set the ambitious goal of rooting out corruption

from the region by 2010. Four years on, we now have the chance at the Forum to see how far we have come. We at TI know that there have been important improvements but these are not enough to defeat corruption in the region. This is why political will needs to be reaffirmed today not only by governments but also from parliamentarians, judges, businesses, media, civil society, with the support of international cooperation.

We are glad to do this stocktaking in El Salvador, because we have found positive signs here of the political will to fight corruption. Recently we congratulated the government for taking the initiative of carrying out the first country visit in the continent done by members of the expert commission of the Inter American Convention against Corruption to get first hand information on the implementation of this international agreement. We urge other Central American countries and the Dominican Republic to follow suit.

The second point I wanted to address briefly is the **cost of fighting corruption**. During the last three years we have witnessed important legislative reforms in the region in areas such as access to information, public contracting, anti-corruption bodies, as well as an increased activism from media and civil society. We are also aware that urgent actions need to be set in place to protect those who dare to denounce corruption, and to strengthen national anti-corruption plans but **mostly we are aware of the high cost of combating corruption in an environment also affected by insecurity, violence and crime**.

Central American societies have suffered the consequences of violence for a long time and today violence threatens the hopes created by the Peace Agreements of 20 years ago. Now it is not civil war but organised crime that creates a web of fear. In some countries, even public institutions are seen to be controlled by illegal organisations, damaging the trust that citizens have in their governments' ability to protect and govern fairly. This in turn severely threatens the achievement of strategic objectives in the region, such as the consolidation of democracy and the fight to alleviate poverty and better the lives of the poor.

Today more than ever we need new, innovative collaborative approaches to fight corruption. It is clear that corruption and crime in the region cannot be defeated by a

government alone. It requires coordinated actions from all the sectors and countries represented at this Forum.

We thank those of you who have joined us for this event and invite you to use this space to think constructively about concrete actions that each of our organisations can take to reach a corruption free-region. Transparency International will be ready to share with the global anti-corruption community that will gather in Thailand next November for the 14th International Anti-Corruption Conference, the outcomes that will be produced during these two days, and seek their support to achieve the goals that will be identified in this Forum.

Let's make use of the political will, of the efforts made so far, and the new actions that we will identify in this Forum, to further the fight against corruption in the region.

Thank you.

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