

15 May 2023

13th Commonwealth Regional Conference of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Africa. Africa

Notes for opening remarks by The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC,
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

Your Excellency,

Honourable Ministers,

Heads of Anti-Corruption Bodies,

Distinguished delegates,

Commonwealth friends and colleagues,

Greetings to you all - it is so good to be here in the Seychelles again, and so good to see so many of you again.

As we collaborate and encourage one another in the spirit of Commonwealth goodwill and mutual support, this gathering is of immense importance for our joined-up Anti-Corruption work.

Our present circumstances, with social and economic resources increasingly overstretched, and pressures being faced by our governments and our people, make building integrity more important than ever.

Let us remind ourselves in simple terms of the scale of the challenge we face:

The UN calculates the global cost of corruption at \$3.6 trillion each year.

The global proceeds from criminal activities are estimated at between \$1 trillion and \$1.6 trillion per year.

Every year \$1 trillion is paid in bribes while an estimated \$2.6 trillion are stolen annually through corruption - a sum equivalent to more than 5 per cent of the global GDP.

In developing countries, according to the United Nations Development Programme, funds lost to corruption are estimated at 10 times the amount of official development assistance.

Corrupt money associated with bribes received by public officials from developing and transition countries is estimated at \$20 billion to \$40 billion per year—a figure equivalent to 20 to 40 percent of flows of official development assistance (ODA).

It is estimated that Africa loses more than \$50 billion a year to illicit flows, and that over the past 50 years, Africa has lost more than \$1 trillion, equivalent to all the official development assistance received during the same period.

According to Africa Growth Initiative, while between 1980 and 2018, sub-Saharan Africa received nearly \$2 trillion in foreign direct

investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA), it discharged over \$1 trillion in illicit financial flows.

The whole of Africa bled an aggregate \$1.3 trillion of illicit financial flows during the same period.

This is enough money to lift above the poverty threshold the 1.4 billion people who get by on less than \$1.25 a day and to keep them there for at least six years.

Transparency International states that corruption costs the health sector US\$500 billion every year.

This is more than the amount needed for worldwide universal health coverage.

Every \$100 million lost to corruption could fund full immunisations for 4 million children or provide water connections for some 250,000 households.

While we tend to think of corruption in purely monetary terms, the truth is that it costs us the quality of our lives.

Corruption is a serious crime which can undermine social and economic development in all societies.

No country, region or community is immune.

It damages education, health, justice, democracy, prosperity and development - and it is one of the biggest impediments to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We cannot emphasise enough the view that the success of all other SDGs depends crucially on getting to grips with the corrosion of corruption.

And we must be clear that globally, the amount of money lost through corruption is equal to the amount of money we need to successfully implement the SDGs.

That is why SDG 16 incorporates specific targets relating to reducing corruption, bribery, and illicit financial flows.

The Covid-19 Pandemic created many challenge: including an environment which was ripe for embezzlement, false claims, kickbacks, and other forms of corruption.

So we now join together in an urgent call for countries to take stock, and put in place mechanisms to prevent such corrupt practices during such emergencies - principally by developing a common framework.

So, tackling corruption must be a priority of the highest order if we are in earnest about achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - and we are.

Doing so brings multiple benefits; poverty is reduced, economic stability and growth are increased, and standards of living raised.

This is why, this conference is of immense importance, for the Africa region, and for the wider Commonwealth.

This makes the theme for our conference as urgent as it is appropriate: ***“Uniting Commonwealth Africa in the Fight Against Corruption”***.

So, we all need to take swift and decisive action to improve transparency and accountability, and to build confidence that our institutions and systems are corruption-free.

Together, we can work towards a whole of government approach:

An approach which can allow us to examine how tax authorities, anti-money laundering authorities and anti-corruption agencies can collaborate to solve this monumental challenge.

And an approach which can enable international collaboration to track ill-gotten money and following through more opaque jurisdictions.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has been active in providing practical technical assistance and development support, to help national anti-corruption agencies build their effectiveness in dealing with corruption.

We use a three-pronged approach, which involves research, capacity-building and networking.

We deliver this approach through a strategy of establishing regional anti-corruption agency networks and training centres, facilitating closer cooperation and learning towards attaining SDG 16.

These networks promote collaboration and the exchange among member countries of best practice and of practitioners.

They also assist with peer review and with measuring the capabilities of agencies against vital benchmarks.

The Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa was created by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2013.

Since then, we have seen a clear strengthening of these institutions - as a direct result of the collaboration this network has encouraged and facilitated.

Annual meetings of the association have been opportunities for capacity building, peer-to-peer learning, and for benchmarking.

And, working with the Government, we have established a Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Centre in Botswana to enable the delivery of key capacity-building programmes for Anti-Corruption Agencies across Commonwealth Africa.

Our Commonwealth Anti-corruption work programme demonstrates our collective determination to eradicate the scourge of corruption, and it has achieved global recognition under the leadership of Dr Roger Koranteng, Head of Public Sector Governance, through a series of global awards.

His latest international Award was the Fighting Corruption Award given to him this year by Themis. Themis International Awards recognise those who are going above and beyond their work in combatting financial crime across the world.

Our Congratulations to Roger and his team! (*SG may wish to lead the audience in applause*)

We are encouraged by the glowing testimony from Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies across our Commonwealth Family.

This reflects our commitment to be a fulcrum of best practice, and our commitment to providing that special Commonwealth blend of leadership, cooperation and assistance - which brings to our members across every continent and ocean in the spirit of collective action.

That leadership, cooperation and assistance shines through in our Anti-Corruption Benchmarks

They are unique - the first intervention in the world which connects all the key areas of public and private conduct.

Our 22 Benchmarks support public and private stakeholders in their efforts to create more robust incentives for both the public and private sectors to undertake anti-corruption measures.

They cover issues from sanctions for corruption offences to investigating and prosecuting authorities, and from political lobbying to disclosure of asset ownership.

They help governments to achieve transparency and good governance in very practical areas of application, by highlighting the importance of companies in becoming compliant in fighting this harmful practice.

They are consistent with international standards, but they go further in covering other areas of concern not previously addressed - and we are fully committed to working with you all to maximise the impact and benefits of this vital tool.

As we move beyond the halfway mark in achieving the SDCs, there is an urgent need for all governments to put in place effective execution, monitoring and evaluation structures for SDG implementation.

The Commonwealth SDG Implementation Toolkit supports countries with policy gap analysis, and with integrating SDG planning into national

development agendas, and tracking and monitoring results.

Collaboration, based on the needs and perspectives of all members of our diverse family of nations, is central to our Commonwealth approach.

We draw together countries at almost every stage of social, economic and political development, including some of the smallest and poorest and some of the largest and richest, including five G20 members.

And we are pioneering fresh approaches which harness the transformational power of technological development, partnering with Intel to develop training in Artificial Intelligence for public sector leaders, which can help to develop automated warning systems where there is a corruption risk in sensitive procurements, or conflicts of interest.

These systems, which were unimaginable before and which are now possible, could help to constrain corruption and save billions of dollars for development.

Uniting in a spirit of goodwill and mutual support, the similarities of our systems and institutions enable lessons learnt in one setting to be shared, adapted and applied elsewhere, so that the benefits of progress can be enjoyed more swiftly, and for the good of all.

By sharing knowledge of what has worked, and understanding better what has not, we can help everyone to move in the right direction with principled, practical, effective and forward-thinking action.

We must continually raise the standards we set for ourselves - whether through mutual support and encouragement among the anti-corruption agencies of our member nations, or by working together to develop Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks

The interdependence of our countries, communities, people and institutions lies at the heart of all that the Commonwealth brings to our world: that includes the work of this 13th Commonwealth Regional Conference of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Africa.

My friends, we face real and complex challenges, but together we are more than equal to them.

So let us work together with renewed vigour, in hope and harmony, to bring health, wholeness, security and prosperity to our Commonwealth.

I wish you a happy and fruitful conference.

Thank you!