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Successful Strategies for Controlling Corruption Some Case Studies

Kevin James Ford

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is Kevin Ford. I am the deputy commissioner of the New York City department of investigation or "DOI" as the agency is known in the United States. DOI, founded in 1873, is the oldest law enforcement agency in the world concerned solely with controlling corruption. DOI, along with Joyce Blalock, inspector general in Washington and Hong Kong's independent commission against corruption, was one of the original founders of this international conference. I had the honour of representing DOI at the first IACC which was held in Washington, D.C., in 1983. DOI hosted the second IACC in 1985 and I have had the pleasure of attending most of the subsequent conferences throughout the world. I am also a member of the IACC council which, together with Transparency International, has assisted our Peruvian hosts in organising the present conference.

The purpose of this workshop, indeed the very purpose of this conference, is to permit us to exchange ideas on successful strategies for controlling corruption. We all share this goal because we are all confronted with the reality of corruption in our own nations, states and cities.

It is often said that the world is becoming a smaller place. It is certainly true that modern technology, newer and faster means of communication and transportation, films, television and the internet, has contributed greatly to the sharing of ideas and commerce on a level never before imagined. We see evidence every day of the global economy; of market forces that know no state or national boundaries. We must begin to recognise that despite the great distances that separate us, the vast oceans and mountain ranges, despite the great variety of cultures, races, languages, customs and political ideologies that distinguish us, we are, after all, far more alike than most of us care to admit. Certainly, those who engage in corrupt conduct are not bothered by national boundaries or differences in language and customs.

In the end, we share essentially the same dreams and desires; we are all seeking peace and prosperity for ourselves, for our families, for our nations and our people. Of course, we must confront and overcome the same problems in order to realise these dreams: endemic problems such as poverty, pestilence, war, ignorance and prejudice. We are meeting here in Lima this week to address one of mankind's oldest and most persistent foes: corruption.

I will always remember an amusing incident which occurred at the opening session of the first anti-corruption conference in 1983. Since there were only 50 to 60 participants, representing some 20 nations, it was suggested that each participant introduce him or herself, identify their agency or profession, and briefly describe the nature of the corruption problem in their nation or jurisdiction. One of the participants, a senior general in his country, introduced himself and explained that he was merely attending the conference as an observer since his country did not have corruption. "In our country," he explained "corruption is illegal."

Surely it is evident that every society on earth, regardless of its political system or laws, its culture or religious heritage, is bedevilled by corruption at all levels of government and society to a greater or lesser degree. Corruption is and always has been a universal fact of human existence; as unconquerable in its way as poverty and ignorance, human ills with which it is directly connected. It is not a phenomenon peculiar to any particular culture, nation or ideology. No society on earth has yet found a cure for corruption; no society has succeeded in eliminating it. It is naive to even speak in such terms.

It is not naive, however, to seek to control corruption. Indeed it is imperative that we should do so constantly and vigorously. As some of the projects we will discuss in this workshop demonstrate, it is possible to control some forms of corruption some of the time and even to succeed, through sustained and popularly supported programs, in greatly diminishing the impact of corruption on an entire city, state or nation. I offer Hong Kong, Singapore and even New York City as relatively recent examples where endemic and widespread corruption has largely been contained (although no one would argue that it has been entirely eliminated).

We are fortunate to be witness to an age in which it is no longer acceptable for nations to ignore corruption. Even the most repressive regimes on earth must at least pay lip service to the notion that corruption is an evil which must be condemned. (Although I note that, for the most part, the regimes to which I refer did not send representatives to this conference). As several people have observed this week, it is time for corruption to be recognised for what it is: a fundamental violation of human rights.

I am sure that all of you who are actively engaged in efforts to confront corruption in your own nations and societies become discouraged at times. I have spent the past 25 years, virtually my entire professional career, fighting corruption in its many guises; first as a policeman, later as an inspector general and public prosecutor but, most of all, as a concerned citizen. In that time, I have witnessed a few successes but also many failures and setbacks. Nevertheless, I continue to believe that, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

I believe that we can all benefit by sharing our experience in combating corruption, the failures as well as the successes. What are the factors or conditions that give rise to corruption? What are the ingredients necessary to achieve even limited success in controlling corruption? Is it possible to achieve such success in the face of anti-democratic Forces? Is it possible to achieve such success with only limited resources? In the face of widespread poverty?

I suggest that we look for the answers to such questions in the examples presented by our panellists this afternoon as well as in the practical experiences of many of the other participants in conferences such as this.

Now, permit me to introduce our distinguished panellists.

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Mr. Ford is the deputy commissioner for the New York City department of investigation where he is responsible for the supervision of several hundred lawyers, accountants, detectives and special investigators engaged in criminal investigations involving corruption and fraud throughout the city of New York. As deputy commissioner for investigations, he is also responsible for managing the city-wide inspector general program.

Prior to becoming deputy commissioner, Mr. Ford served New York city in a variety of capacities such as inspector general and examining attorney. He has also served for the past twelve years as a special assistant United States attorney or federal prosecutor in Manhattan.

Prior to coming to New York in 1982, Mr. Ford served as a detective inspector in San Francisco, California for a period of eight years. He is a graduate of Rutgers university and received his law degree from the University of Santa Clara in Santa Clara, California.

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