

Mr. Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen. I should start by saying that my minister, Mr. Korthals, would have very much liked to address you in person. However, since in The Netherlands, the Minister of Justice is responsible not only for the fight against corruption, but also for the fight against terrorism, you may understand that he was unable to come here today, so you will have to make do with the Vice-Minister. Nevertheless, it is a great pleasure for me to address this conference and I'm particularly grateful to the organizers for offering me the opportunity to address here the results of the Global Forum II on fighting corruption and safeguarding integrity that was held in The Hague earlier this year.

I would like to say a few words about the interaction between Global Forum II, as we call it, and this conference, and on the preparation of a new United Nations convention against corruption that will start shortly. As many of you will know, a few months ago, the Dutch government hosted the second Global Forum on fighting corruption and safeguarding integrity in The Hague, in which 1,600 participants representing 153 countries engaged in a week of a lively debate. More than one hundred ministers participated in the ministerial meeting and adopted a substantial final declaration. They also took note of reports of five workshops containing best practices in a number of fields. Although the global forum and the international anti-corruption conference share exactly the same objective - that is, to combat corruption and safeguard integrity, there are differences as well. The Global Forum is basically an intergovernmental process even though many non-governmental organizations participate, and I've seen many of you in The Hague, and of course with great pleasure.

The idea behind the Global Forum is twofold. On the one hand it provides an opportunity for experts to discuss the latest trends in anti-corruption policies, on the other it calls on governments to reaffirm their active and strong commitment to any such policies, and to the main impact of the Global Forum II. Some 60 more countries were represented at the second forum than at the first one held in Washington a few years ago. Therefore the international commitment to fight corruption is now more widespread than ever. I would like to stress that the outcome of the second Global Forum should be of relevance to the elaboration of the United Nations convention against corruption.

I believe that, in this respect, the final declaration of the Global Forum contained a number of valuable elements. Firstly, the final declaration makes it clear that we need strong and reliable institutions to lead the fight against corruption. Secondly, corruption of foreign public officials should be just as punishable as corruption of national public officials. Thirdly, there can be no safe havens for the proceeds of corruption, and fourthly, we must be ready to lead by example. I listened with great care to what you, Mr. Prime Minister, said on entering the office poor and leaving it, if possible, as poor as you came into it. This holds true for politicians as well as for civil servants and, in particular, for the judiciary as one of the most important parts of strong institutions is a truly independent judiciary.

Finally, our performance in combating corruption should be monitored; it should be monitored not only on the national level, but also at regional and international levels. Such monitoring exercises should lead to open public reports so that there will be full transparency and accountability. May I add that for this we need a free press and a strong civil society, as has been said before. This was clear when the awards were given yesterday to our friends from Brazil.

During the past weeks, the Netherlands government has been making an effort to use both the final declaration of the Global Forum II and the comments of participating states to develop what should be the main ingredients of the United Nations convention to come. My government intends to submit a draft convention to the United Nations Secretariat before the end of this month so that it can be of use during the preparatory meeting to be held in Argentina in early December. The following elements of an anti-corruption strategy should, in my view, be reflected in the UN convention to come. An extensive chapter on preventive measures should properly reflect policies on transparency and accountability at all levels of government. Both the issue of the defending of political parties and the special position of the judiciary should be addressed. The convention should be comprehensive and include not only the offences of bribery, but also related offences, such as money laundering. An important issue that should be addressed is the problem of embezzled state funds. As an underlying concept, mention should be made of abuse of power. I would favor further development of this concept so that it will be easier to agree on the necessary mutual legal assistance concerning the return of embezzled state funds that have been acquired by an abuse of power.

Mr. Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen, international cooperation is indispensable and I hope that this conference will contribute to a permanent dialogue among countries and people, and confirm our genuine willingness to work together. Thank you very much.