

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY

9 December 2010

Corruption is a threat to development, democracy and stability. It distorts markets, curbs economic growth and discourages foreign investment. It erodes public services and trust in officials. And it contributes to environmental damage and endangers public health by enabling the illegal dumping of hazardous waste and the production and distribution of counterfeit medicines.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption has helped the public sector to make progress in deterring these crimes. Last year, the Convention's States parties, which now number 148, established a peer review mechanism to identify gaps in national anti-corruption laws and practices -- a major breakthrough that can help governments halt bribe-taking and the embezzlement of public funds.

The private sector's contribution is also essential. Corruption acts as a hidden overhead charge that drives up prices and erodes quality without any benefit to producers or consumers. Preventing corruption makes good business sense. Increasingly, investors are factoring not only environmental, social and governance considerations into their decision-making, but sound ethical performance as well.

I call on business leaders worldwide to denounce corruption and to back their words with strict prohibitions against it. They should adopt anti-corruption policies in line with the United Nations Convention and put in place the necessary checks to strengthen integrity and transparency. I also urge corporations to work more closely with the United Nations on this issue. In particular, they should consider joining the UN Global Compact, the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, which provides participants with tools to fight all forms of corruption, including extortion and bribery.

What we urge upon the public and private sectors, we at the United Nations must practice ourselves. An ethical organizational culture is one of the best antidotes to corruption. The United Nations Ethics Office promotes accountability, integrity and transparency. A thorough policy protects staff against retaliation if they report misconduct or participate in audits and investigations that may expose unethical behaviour.

The United Nations is also working to combat corruption in the conduct of its activities, including procurement, by ensuring individual accountability, collaborating with law enforcement officials, and investigating all possible instances of corruption that may arise. On 8-9 December at UN Headquarters in New York, the UN Office of

Internal Oversight Services is bringing together organizations from around the world for a conference aimed at strengthening the role of internal investigations in combating corruption.

On this International Anti-Corruption Day, let us all do our part to foster ethical practices, safeguard trust and ensure no diversion of the precious resources needed for our shared work for development and peace.