Welcome to the 13th International Anti-Corruption Conference in Athens, Greece. As we confront the global financial crisis, food shortages and pressing environmental and energy concerns, the focus of the conference ‘Global transparency: fighting corruption for a sustainable future’ has a most obvious relevance.

Our success over the coming days in examining the role of good governance and accountability in the four thematic streams: peace and security, natural resources and energy, climate change and sustainable globalisation, will play a crucial role in determining our collective futures.

As the leading global forum on governance and anti-corruption, the IACC brings together the experience and knowledge of heads of state, civil society, academics, compliance experts, business and government representatives to collectively formulate innovative and effective solutions, as well as forge new partnerships, to better tackle the increasingly sophisticated challenges posed by corruption. Assembling 1300 participants from more than 120 countries, the 13th IACC is the largest in its 25-year history and provides an unprecedented opportunity to advance the anti-corruption agenda.

The achievements of previous IACCs are testament to the tremendous progress of the anti-corruption movement: we have seen public officials from policemen to presidents being held to account, the private sector assume an increasing role in corporate social responsibility, and civil society organisations increase in numbers and influence, advocating for positive change.

As Chairman of the IACC Council, together with our partners Huguette Labelle, Chair of Transparency International and Costas Bakouris, Chair of TI Greece, I look forward to the participants at this conference producing innovative and practical outcomes for the fight against corruption.

In closing, I would like to thank Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, Minister of Justice Sotiris Hadzidakis and the government of the Hellenic Republic for hosting our 13th IACC, the organising committee for their great work and the people of Athens for their warm welcome.

"The measure of a man is what he does with power" – Plato

Hon. Justice Barry O’Keefe AM (Ret) Chairman of the IACC Council
Interview

Huguette Labelle, Chair, Transparency International

Congratulations on your re-election as Chair of Transparency International. What inspired you to join the fight against corruption, and what inspires you now?

Thank you. While working at the Canadian International Development Agency, I saw the effect of corruption first hand; how it robs the poor of their future, trapping them in poverty. This compelled me to join the fight against corruption and Transparency International. Since then I have had an opportunity to delve even deeper into the impact corruption has on people: for instance how it feeds violence in countries around the world. But I have also witnessed the positive effects we can have by joining forces with different groups in society. That is what we have seen during Transparency International’s 15 years and this is why we simply cannot give up.

Transparency International celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. Are you optimistic about the fight against corruption?

Without a doubt. So much has been accomplished in the last 15 years that it is difficult for me to limit myself to giving you only a few examples. In the five years of the UN Convention against Corruption’s existence, 126 states have ratified it. The earlier landmark OECD convention criminalised the bribery of foreign public officials, which in some countries had even been tax deductible. These conventions, together with regional ones, such as the African Union’s and the Organization of American States’, demonstrate just how much people’s attitudes have changed towards corruption.

We now see elections in many countries around the world won or lost on the issue of corruption, something unheard of before. The G8 has not only made fighting corruption an international priority, but has recognised it as a crucial roadblock to development. Similarly, institutions such as the World Bank have placed governance and anti-corruption at the top of their agendas.

The well documented corporate scandals are creating a new wave of anti-corruption measures, as these industries strive to instil integrity at the core of their operations.

We can also draw hope from Transparency International’s progression and success stories. We now have a chapter in close to 100 countries, giving Transparency International a local grounding and a capacity to make real change around the world.

Is there a message you would like all participants of the 13th IACC to take away with them?

Corruption is not inevitable, and people, especially the poor, are its real victims. The dedicated and courageous people that have come from more than 120 countries to be at the 13th IACC, should recognise the change that they have already brought about. My hope is that we continue together to fight corruption with both determination and commitment.

What role do you believe transparency should play in addressing the global financial crisis?

As leaders meet to discuss reforms they should ensure that the world’s financial system is rebuilt on a foundation of transparency and accountability. Much work needs to be done to restore public trust and establish effective safeguards. The repercussions of the financial crisis are being felt throughout the world, and it is tragically the poor that will bear the brunt of the financial authorities’ mismanagement of funds and the public authorities’ failure to uphold the integrity and soundness of banking. It should also serve as a call to address the fiscal havens where monies can be hidden and opacity eigns.

The road from Guatemala: challenges, values and pragmatic actions at the IACC

By Frank Vogl

Transparency International Advisory Council Member

The 13th IACC in Athens dawns amid the thundering crashes of the global financial system. A lack of transparency across finance is stunningly evident in the gravest dislocation of the credit markets in decades, and now the outlook for world economic prospects is bleak. Plunging economic activity and revenue flows to governments, along with increases in unemployment and corporate and personal bankruptcies, threaten to derail efforts to tackle poverty, human rights abuse, crime, corruption and environmental destruction. Set against such a somber background, the challenge for us in Athens is clear: to find pragmatic approaches to mitigate these dangers and ensure that our collective determination and purpose do not falter.

Significant progress has been made in a number of areas that were prominent on the IACC agenda two years ago in Guatemala. Unsurprisingly, though, frustration continues to dominate others. The enforcement of the OECD, UN and Inter-American anti-corruption conventions were all thoroughly discussed in Guatemala, yet progress since has been disappointing. The latter has seen scant real progress, and while the UN pact has stimulated major civil society interest and effort, meaningful implementation by many countries remains to be seen. It is a similar story with the OECD convention: although a number of countries have started investigations and prosecutions in line with the convention’s stipulations, action from many signatory nations has simply not happened.

At the last IACC a resolution was approved that decried the failure of the authorities in Chile to ship former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori back to Peru to stand trial. Since then the Chileans have done the right thing and Fujimori has been imprisoned. This important example sends the message to top corrupt officials around the world that the risks they take are ever greater. The continuing emergence of foreign bribery scandals though, shows that this message must grow more forceful still and resonate both on the domestic and international stages. Only this summer 74 business tycoons convicted for fraud, embezzlement and corruption were given a presidential pardon in South Korea, in the name of offsetting slowing investment.

Guatemala was also a defining moment for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The pressure on governments and companies to become more transparent is palpably rising, pushed by EITI and leaders such as Publish What You Pay and Global Witness, and supported by Transparency International’s landmark study on revenue transparency in more than 40 oil and gas companies.

The last IACC also played host to formal and informal discussions on the relationships between rising levels of corruption and human rights abuses. Here too one senses that awareness of the connection is rising. It is a positive sign that the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Irene Khan, should be one of the 13th IACC’s plenary speakers.

The devastating earthquake in Pakistan and the tsunami in Indonesia served to remind the 12th IACC of the potential for large-scale corruption at times of humanitarian disaster when charitable grants and official aid flood into a country in a haphazard manner. The discussion on how to prevent such abuse was highly productive, and can take some inspirational credit for the recent Transparency International report on the subject, which highlights the experiences of seven major international humanitarian NGOs.

These examples represent only a taste of the action-oriented work that has advanced since Guatemala and we can look forward to learning more on these and other critical initiatives in the course of the 13th IACC.
DO NOT MISS!

Be sure to be in the Alexandra Trianti Hall at 14.00 for the official opening ceremony of the 13th IACC!

Plenary 1: Corruption, Peace and Security

Conflict and security are issues with global implications, distorting development, justice, human rights and the state’s ability to govern effectively.

HAH Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch;  
Siim Kallas, Vice-President of the European Commission;  
Nikos Passas, Professor at Northeastern University College of Criminal Justice;  
Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous peoples;  
Mark Pieth, Professor of Criminal Law at Basel University and Chairman of the OECD Working Group on Bribery in International Business Transactions;  
and Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International

Moderated by José Ugaz, Senior Partner and Team Leader of the Criminal Division of Benites, Forno & Ugaz.

Join them for the first plenary of the 13th IACC as they explore the causes and consequences of corruption in security and justice institutions, and map how corruption can serve as both the facilitator and source of security risks.

Social events at the 13th IACC

30 October (19.30-23.00) Welcome cocktail

Relax and enjoy a Greek-Mediterranean buffet as world renowned soprano Anna Alexopoulou, accompanied by the talented pianist Frixos Mortzos, provide a fitting end to the first day of the 13th IACC.

31 October (20.00-23.00) Networking event

Be serenaded under the stars as a mandolin orchestra play well-known Athenian songs and excerpts of operettas in the Technopolis Park.

1 November (20.00-00.30) Official conference dinner

Live and taste a ‘festive Athenian night’ in the Faliro Pavilion. Argyro Kaparou, Kostas Matzios and their orchestra will set the mood with popular songs by Greek composers.

2 November (15.30-19.30) Farewell social event

Following a light lunch at the Megaron conference centre get ready for an exclusive guided tour of Greece’s National Archeological Museum. With more than 20,000 exhibits, the largest museum in Greece provides a stunning overview of Greek civilisation from the beginnings of Prehistory to Late Antiquity.

Workshop session 1 (17.30-19.30)

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http://iaccforum.wordpress.com/

– serves as a platform for exchange and dialogue around the 13th IACC.

It seeks to reflect the breadth and diversity of the anti-corruption movement, featuring a range of contributors from civil society, the private sector, and governmental and inter-governmental organisations.

Check in throughout the conference – and afterwards – for insightful posts, controversial articles and colourful commentary from Athens and beyond. The IACC Forum blog will also provide up-to-the minute information about the IACC, plenaries, social events and schedule changes.

The IACC Forum is about an exchange of views, so we encourage you to post comments on the articles you read.

For any questions, please contact blog editor Jesse Garcia (jgarcia@transparency.org), Communications Officer at the Transparency International Secretariat in Berlin.

IACC Forum blog:
online platform for dialogue around the conference

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