

2019 International Anti-Corruption Day Speaking Notes

Delivered by the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, Adv Richard Sizani

University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Theme: United Against Corruption: Building a Culture of Accountability for Sustainable Development

1. Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour to stand before you this morning, to observe a day that must constitute one of the most important on our calendar. International Anti-Corruption Day is a day in which we reflect meaningfully on how this global concern impacts on the lives of ordinary people – men, women and persons who are on the receiving end of the devastating impacts of corruption.
2. The United Nations Convention on Corruption (UNCAC) describes corruption as an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish. In the South African context, section 3 of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004, defines corruption among others, as the abuse of office for personal gain. Reading the whole section, you will still find that a number of ordinarily corrupt practices will not be included and will fall short of the definition of UNCAC.
3. The fight against corruption is perhaps one of the most defining struggles of our time. It is a priority struggle precisely because there is far too much at stake. While both developing and developed countries are battling with this scourge, empirical evidence suggests to us that corruption hurts the poor disproportionately.
4. It is a major contributor to instability and poverty, and is a dominant factor driving fragile countries towards state failure. Here on the African continent, we know too well the calamitous effects that corruption has had on our nation states – effects that have rendered some of these nations failed states.

5. Global Financial Integrity¹ estimates that from 2005 to 2014 Africa lost between R500 billion and R800 billion in illicit financial flows. This represents about 74% of all financing required - about R1.2 trillion - to develop infrastructure to service Africa's growth needs. Corruption is devastating in countries such as Egypt, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, etc.
6. In South Africa, corruption has had immeasurably brutal consequences on the poor. Its institutionalisation and systemisation in political and economic spheres have been boundless. According to the Minister of Trade and Industry, Ebrahim Patel, corruption costs our country's GDP almost R30 billion annually as well as the loss of 76 000 jobs that would otherwise have been created.
7. Evidently, corruption hinders investment, both domestic and foreign; reduces growth; restricts trade; distorts the size and composition of government expenditure; weakens the financial system; and strengthens the underground economy. Most importantly, there is a strong connection between corruption and increasing levels of poverty and income inequality. But the costs of corruption are not just financial – they are also socio-political.
8. At a deeper level, corruption threatens our very democracy. It erodes trust in institutions of state, which in turn weakens the state's capacity to fight corruption. A dangerous by-product of the erosion of trust in the state is increasing crime.
9. Additionally, corruption within the criminal justice system in a country like South Africa also has implications for such serious crimes as gender-based violence. When only one in nine women report sexual crimes, in part due to a lack of trust in the system and a belief that criminal justice actors are corrupt, parameters are set for the continued violation of women, girls and the LGBTIQ community that is already vulnerable and disenfranchised.
10. More than anything, and perhaps most significantly, corruption calls into question the very legitimacy of the state. State legitimacy is a key aspect of state-society relations. State sanctioned or enabled corruption results in negative experiences of citizens with the state, a legacy of mistrust, and rejection of the legitimacy of state institutions. Legitimacy matters, because without it there is likely to be conflict and disorder.
11. The former Secretary General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Kofi Annan, once described corruption as a disease, and argued that

¹ A non-profit organization that focuses on advocacy and research of illicit financial flows and advises developing country governments on effective policy solutions.

transparency is an essential part of the treatment. The former Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, explained the specific disease that it is when he contended: "*Corruption is a cancer. A cancer that eats away at citizen's faith in democracy*".

12. In South Africa, our democratic institutions are in the process of being revitalised to carry out its constitutional mandate to give them some semblance of credibility and legitimacy. Part of the corruption in SA was an attack on institutions in the criminal justice system. In many other countries they would have fewer and stronger institutions to fight corruption. In our country there is a multiplicity of institutions, with too much duplication, working against each other, wastage of resources and a lack of cooperation and communication. There is a need for them to be streamlined and strengthened, fewer and better.
13. Building a culture of accountability and ensuring transparency are the radiotherapy of corruption. They are what can and will kill this insidious disease that is corruption – a disease that threatens to tear our country apart and defer its dream of fashioning a developmental state, a disease to which the African continent has lost much to.
14. To win the war against corruption, an ethical culture must be inculcated within the public service and society at large. In order to achieve this we need public servants who selflessly strive to sustainably improve the lives of people by being professional, ethical, principle-centered and values-driven. We need public servants who will transform society and resolve the challenges we face today by committing to the Constitutional Values and Principles in sections 1 and 195 of the Constitution, which govern public administration. In addition, ethical leadership that is grounded on principles of integrity, competency, responsibility, accountability and transparency remains key to fighting the scourge of corruption. The revelations from the Zondo Commission have actually exposed the lack of ethical leadership in our country, both in the private and public sector.
15. To build a culture of accountability and ensure transparency demands that we sustain good governance and institute good models of monitoring and evaluation of our systems. We must harness the power of the people by creating pathways that give citizens relevant tools to engage and participate in their government.
16. Strengthening citizens' demand for anti-corruption and empowering them to hold government accountable is a sustainable approach that helps to build mutual trust between citizens and government. Therefore we need an active

citizenry that is informed and has access to information. We need to move away from what used to be an article of faith of the old British public service that, "*if nobody knows what we are doing as a public service, then nobody knows what we are doing wrong*".

17. Lastly, but just as importantly - international loopholes must also be closed, particularly by countries to whom Africa's illicit capital outflow is directed. Without access to the international financial system, corrupt public officials throughout the world would not be able to launder and hide the proceeds of looted state assets. Major financial centres urgently need to put in place ways to stop their banks and cooperating offshore financial centres from absorbing illicit flows of money.
18. Ladies and gentlemen, on this International Anti-Corruption Day, as we reflect on the strides that we have made in fighting this cancer, may we also recommit ourselves to the struggle for building a culture of accountability for sustainable development.
19. For those who are keen to join the fight against corruption, let me end by quoting Thomas Paine, in *The Crisis*, "*These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.* (Apologies for gender insensitive language.) So forward ever and backwards never in the fight to rid our country of this scourge of corruption.

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