

**Statement by the President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly at the
15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE UN CONVENTION AGAINST
CORRUPTION**

23 May 2018

New York

Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-General Fedotov, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Unfortunately, corruption is still a part of our world. It can happen in poor and rich countries. It can happen in every type of institution. And it can impact everyone. We are here, to face these facts, and to explore what action we can take, to change them. That is why we have gathered in this hall – to mark the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. And I want to thank all of you for joining us – from near and far. And, in opening today’s event, I will make three main points.

First, I want to get behind the terminology. We talk about corruption a lot. We use words like: “transparency”, “regulation”, “accountability”, and “governance”. But, sometimes, they are not enough, to show the reality. And, the reality is that corruption destroys everything in its path. It suffocates growth. And, simply, it is bad – for everyone.

First, it is bad for governments. It shatters trust between people, and the governments that serve them. It can bring entire institutions to their knees. And it means that decisions and policies do not, always, get implemented, on the ground.

Second, it is bad for business. More corruption usually means less investment. Why would a business invest, when the risks are so high? How can they trust, that their contracts will be honoured? That rules will be followed? Or that there will be a remedy, if anything goes wrong?

Third, it is bad for development. It can divert funds away from the people that need them the most. UNDP has found that, in developing countries, funding lost to corruption is about 10 times higher than the amount of official development assistance.

Fourth, it is bad for the environment. Corrupt, back-door deals have been behind some of our biggest environmental disasters.

Fifth, it is bad for security. It allows criminal networks to thrive. And it acts as a bloodline for international terrorism.

And, finally, it is bad for people.

When they are stopped at checkpoints, for bribes... When a bus does not come – or a clinic does not open - because budgets were mismanaged.... Or when they lose all of their savings, from extortion. This is the kind of suffering that corruption brings, to people on the ground. And, another result can be major human rights abuses. Because if violations can be covered up, with a bribe or a favour, people are left very vulnerable indeed.

But the worst thing about corruption is its power. One small incident can have a massive effect. Even if only a few officials are corrupt, they can taint entire institutions. And, the risk of

contagion is huge. If one person gets away with it, others are likely to follow. It takes just the smallest infection, for the whole body to rot.

We all know all of this. That is why, when we set out our vision, for a new world ...we put corruption on the agenda.

So, as my second point today, I will focus on the link between the 2030 Agenda and corruption. Sustainable Development Goal 16 deals, explicitly, with this issue. Overall, it promotes accountable, just and inclusive societies – where the rule of law is strong. One of the targets – target 16.6 – calls on us to substantially reduce corruption and bribery - in all forms. Other targets reinforce this. For example, one has a focus on tackling illicit financial and arms flows. But actually, corruption is not limited to Goal 16. Rather, it is linked to the entire 2030 Agenda.

If we want to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals, we need to take concrete steps. This will mean allocating budgets. It will mean raising more funds. It will mean new policies and new legislation. And it will mean innovative ways of working together. But corruption can put a stop, to all of this. It can make sure that a law cannot be implemented, on the ground... That a decision can be swayed, away, from the common good... Or that a pot of funding can disappear into thin air.

My third point is to reflect on the steps ahead. We have already achieved a lot. Individually – and collectively, through the UN General Assembly. Since the early 1990s, the Assembly has called for action on corruption. And, in 2003, it adopted the United Nations Convention against Corruption. This is the bedrock of our work in this area. It acted as our first international mechanism on corruption. And it designated an International Anti-Corruption Day, to take place each year, in December.

But, in the 15 years since, we have learnt something important: the battle against corruption is not one that can be fought alone. Yes, the primary responsibility lies in the hands of governments – to legislate, to implement, and to enforce. But they cannot do it alone. Journalists and other media representatives play a big role, as watchdogs. The private sector is crucial to any effort to stem corruption. As more and more businesses move to increase transparency and sustainability, the United Nations must be involved. Civil society and academia are key players. Not only do they monitor progress, they are also using training, advocacy and technology – to empower people, against corruption.

We must also remember that corruption does not stay, neatly, within borders. Illicit financial flows spill over them – with destructive effects. And they can only be stemmed by stronger partnerships.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Like I said at the start, we are here to face the facts. And, the facts are not positive. Corruption is, still, too destructive, too common, and too accepted, in our world today. But the power is in our hands, to alter these facts – and create a new reality. Let us use this forum, today, as a step towards doing just that.

I thank you.