



Read-out, Geneva side event 2: Institutional and Societal Methods for Fighting Corruption

- To open the event, a video entitled “How corruption hurts me?” was broadcast, in which we heard about the challenges facing Afghan citizens in accessing services that should be free; and in accessing jobs that are not recruited based on merit.
- After the video, HE UK Ambassador Blake took the floor to welcome participants and introduced the open session.
- UK Minister HE Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon gave opening remarks, in which he spoke about the potentially bright future for Afghanistan if good governance and anti-corruption efforts are genuine and concerted. The Minister mentioned the fact that anti-corruption requires a whole of society approach, but also flagged the need for high level officials to lead by example. He listed some areas that the UK would like to see more progress in, for example corruption prosecution and improved public financial management. He mentioned the importance of integrity in the security sector and noted the UK’s continued support for ANDSF sustainment, which includes work on anti-corruption. The Minister highlighted the UK’s commitment and partnership on anti-corruption going forward.
- The EU Commissioner for International Partnerships and the UN Resident Coordinator noted the importance of trust in the government for proper use of public funds. The UN Resident Coordinator noted that Mr Zaki Daryabi, a prominent Afghan media representative, has been nominated and shortlisted for the 2020 Anti-Corruption award by Transparency International.
- The keynote speaker, His Excellency the First Vice President, outlined some of the key achievements of the current administration in countering corruption. He mentioned tackling land grabbing, investigating high level corruption cases, tackling mismanagement in the health system and ensuring transparency in the aid system. His Excellency made a firm commitment to continue these efforts with the support of the international community.
- Ambassador Blake thanked the Vice President before introducing the next video: “How do I fight corruption in my community?” The video communicated how Afghan citizens – police, doctors, teachers, elders and activists – all contribute to anti-corruption efforts in their daily lives. This reflected the theme of the whole event, which was the need for a whole of government and whole of society approach.
- The panel discussion was chaired by Romana Schweiger, Head of Rule of Law in UNAMA. The panel included a range of representation from government to academia to civil society, including His Excellency the Attorney General, and Her Excellency the Ombudsperson. A number of common topics were discussed. These included: the need for a multi-dimensional approach to tackling corruption; the requirement for political consensus for technical solutions to bear fruit; and the potential for the use of new technologies, such as blockchain, to promote transparency and accountability.

- A number of speakers noted the importance of improving procurement processes in government to prevent leakage of public funds. This was particularly apparent during the COVID-19 crisis when procurement of medicines and other goods were carried out quickly, without the same level of scrutiny, leading to several cases of corruption amongst officials. The need to give more ownership to local authorities for local budgeting and procurement, and the need to involve local communities in oversight and decision making on budget allocation, were messages that resounded through multiple statements.
- Several speakers also mentioned that investigation, prosecution and asset recovery are important parts of the holistic approach to anti-corruption. The UNCAC domestic and international obligations were highlighted, including international cooperation for financial investigations and tackling money laundering. The Attorney General demonstrated progress in the area of prosecution and outlined how, in the last few years, corruption prosecution and an enabling legal environment, had been prioritised.
- The link between this side event and the Anti-Corruption/ANPDF Governance Workshop in Kabul was made by several speakers. The EU Ambassador noted that these events were not standalone, but were part of the bigger effort on anti-corruption reform. He also called on the Afghan government to evaluate the old anti-corruption strategy and develop a new long-term strategy, based on this evaluation. This is a message that other Ambassadors in Kabul have been conveying to the government collectively.
- The panel provided a lot of food for thought, and was followed by lively inputs from the floor. We heard from the US Ambassador about the need for strategic communications about anti-corruption efforts, and prosecution in particular, to create trust in government and a deterrent effect amongst corrupt actors. Italian Minister Alfredo Mangoni outlined the Italian approach to anti-corruption – judicial and law enforcement combined with implementation of laws, strong institutions, and consensus building on transparency and accountability – which could be adopted and adjusted for the Afghan context. The Australian Ambassador echoed some of these points and highlighted the need for a consolidated anti-corruption/national accountability strategy, and the need to use academic research and evidence – as presented by panellist Professor Heather Marquette – to inform our approach. We also heard from the Access to Information Commission, the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, and the media activist Zaki Daryabi, on the importance of free media, the need for a local approach to anti-corruption and the links between corruption, crime and war economies.
- Her Excellency UK Ambassador Blake took the floor for concluding remarks, thanking all participants and co-hosts. Ambassador Blake noted the strong convergent views throughout the event. A few points the UK Ambassador highlighted were the important of public trust in institutions in order for stability and economic growth; the need to end impunity in corruption cases; and the need to work together across the government, Afghan society, and the international community, to ensure that anti-corruption efforts benefit all Afghans.
- Ambassador Blake gave the last word to Afghan citizens in the final video to close the event: why is my future better without corruption?