



2020 AFGHANISTAN CONFERENCE

Virtual Side Event: Institutional and societal methods for fighting corruption

23 November 2020, 13:30 - 15:00 (UTC+1, Geneva)

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction:

State-building and good governance rely on the rule of law as well as transparent, efficient and accountable institutions. Integrity must be built by the government and by all segments of society: from the grassroots up, and from the national level down. The anti-corruption side event will look at lessons learned from fighting corruption in different contexts and how they may be applied more efficiently to Afghanistan, particularly in light of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, such as peace, justice and strong institutions. In addition to institutional measures, civil society, religious leaders, community elders and free media also have an important role in fostering accountability and enabling the growth of broad confidence in public institutions.

Objective:

Raise awareness amongst delegates on the importance of anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan, and generate innovative ideas for reform, based on lessons from past experiences in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Context:

Talks in Doha are encouraging Afghans to be hopeful and determined to create a peaceful, prosperous and stable future for the country. The imperative to consolidate gains and to revise, streamline and improve the institutional framework provides a key opportunity to rethink anti-corruption efforts. Lessons learned in Afghanistan, as well as through anti-corruption efforts in other countries, provide ideas and inspiration. The side-event will highlight which gains are worth preserving and will highlight areas where improvements are required to respond to contemporary changes and opportunities. It will seek to highlight the importance of participatory approaches, including of religious actors and elders, and to outline the way forward to build a robust institutional landscape against corruption. It will



highlight in particular the leadership of women, and the importance of their contribution to fight corruption nationally and in their communities.

Corruption in its most general definition is the misuse of public trust for private gain. While Afghanistan's ranking on the international corruption perceptions index is yet to reflect change, important anti-corruption gains have been made in recent years, which are particularly commendable in a conflict affected state. The will for reform is strong, but corruption remains a pervasive part of Afghan life and an impediment to Afghanistan's recovery. Failing to tackle corruption in Afghanistan will mean failure to address key development and stability challenges that continue to hamper the country.

A multi-pronged and innovative approach, involving all levels of society, is needed to tackle corruption in Afghanistan. Citizens, civil society and media must hold their local and national leaders to account, while being given the space to do so. Institutions as well as individuals must take up the fight against corruption, through prevention as well as punishment. The international community must provide support and also ensure oversight of their own development funds.

The Side-Event will encompass:

An Introduction and Opening Remarks from International Delegates:

This section will allow prominent members of the international community to reaffirm their commitment to partnering with the Afghan government to fight corruption across sectors. The opening remarks will make the link between anti-corruption, stability and peace, and will acknowledge the international community's responsibility when it comes to their aid money.

A key-note address to discuss the following questions:

- ⇒ How does corruption impact state/institution building and erode trust in government?
- ⇒ What possibilities do peace negotiations offer to reduce the scale of corruption in Afghanistan?
- ⇒ How will curbing corruption bring equitable development and lasting peace?
- ⇒ Role of women in fighting corruption (active agents)?
- ⇒ What is the role of religious leaders and how can we include them more?

A Panel discussion:

- **From grassroots to national level action: religious actors, civil society and media standing up against corruption**

Opinion polls show that the perception of corruption is a major grievance for Afghan citizens. Corruption has a concrete impact on all citizens of Afghanistan, who are required to pay bribes in nearly every aspect of daily life, and who suffer from inequities in economic and employment



opportunities as a result of widespread nepotism and patronage. The perception of endemic corruption - based, unfortunately, on real experiences as a recent survey demonstrated - has undermined public confidence in Government institutions, which has in turn hindered the pursuit of wider objectives, such as domestic political stability, electoral preparations, and a credible peace process with the armed opposition. This segment of the side event explores the question: “What can I do to fight corruption for a better future?” (also featured in the introductory video). Repeated reference to corruption in street art is another indicator of the importance of countering corruption.

The panel presentation should address the following questions:

- ⇒ What methods does media and civil society use to expose corruption? How could these be strengthened?
- ⇒ How can civil society effectively contribute to counter corruption in Kabul and provinces?
- ⇒ What is the potential of religious leaders in fighting corruption?

- **How COVID-19 rocked the rule of law and promoted corruption. A test for Afghan institutions**

Corruption is an indicator of weak governance and institutions. Institution-building has been at the heart of Afghanistan’s reform process since 2001. When effective, institutions remove the uncertainty of human interaction and build trust. They allow for the specialization of political functions that are necessary for modern governance. But the building of institutions poses the simultaneous problem of opportunities for corruption being created in the name of removing them. As institutions are being consolidated, there are huge incentives by those who have power to co-opt them. Those who have power at the beginning of a process stand the most to lose through the institutionalization of politics. While institutions exist to reduce uncertainty, the legacy of failed institution-building collided with uncertainties about the direction of Afghanistan’s future and was hit hard by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The panel presentation should address the following questions:

- ⇒ How effective are Afghanistan’s anti-corruption institutions, for which reforms are ongoing?
- ⇒ How did Afghanistan’s anti-corruption institutions stand the pressure of managing this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis? How did they respond to new corruption opportunities created through the crisis?
- ⇒ Why are preventive mechanisms so important in countering corruption?

- **Using evidence and innovation to curb corruption: what has and has not worked elsewhere**

The fight against corruption has been ongoing for many years but has not borne much fruit. In this segment we hear about how academia, in particular, is contributing to the fight against corruption in other countries, and about innovative and granular approaches to corruption in other countries that have added up to more than the sum of their parts. This segment will provide food for thought for practitioners and policy makers in Afghanistan, and will help to bust some of the popular myths about anti-corruption reform, helping to force us out of our comfort zone.



The panel presentation should address the following questions:

- ⇒ How is research and evidence being used to improve anti-corruption efforts?
- ⇒ How is technology helping to promote inclusion of all of society in anti-corruption reform?

- **The role of justice and law enforcement in curbing corruption**

Aside from the intrinsic link between corruption, organised crime and the ongoing conflict, the budget deficit in Afghanistan and heavy reliance on foreign aid makes it essential that funds lost to corruption are reduced and some of the proceeds are put back into the state. It is very difficult to quantify the value of these lost funds, but based on some of the criminal cases and academic research, it is estimated to be at least hundreds of millions annually. Curbing corruption and recovering funds will directly contribute to poverty alleviation and peace, and will help Afghanistan towards a path of self-reliance. Afghanistan has continuously strengthened its justice system and put in place various specialised institutions. These have increasingly gained reputation, but do they have a deterrent effect yet?

The panel presentation should address the following questions:

- ⇒ How good is Afghanistan's law enforcement system in fighting corruption? How does the security climate impact on corruption prosecutions?
- ⇒ How does money stolen from the Afghan people get returned to them?
- ⇒ Could historically embedded and socially accepted institutions play a stronger role in the enforcement?

A video screening:

Montage of statements from Afghan citizens with different backgrounds about how corruption impacts their daily lives and what they do to curb it.

Three videos of 2 min each will be played throughout the side-event with the questions:

- ⇒ How does corruption hurt me?
- ⇒ How do I fight against corruption in my community?
- ⇒ Why is my future better without corruption?



AGENDA

Opening Video	“How does corruption hurt me?”	3min
Introduction and opening remarks	UK delegation lead EU Delegate German Delegate (TBC)	10 min
Key-note address	High Level Afghan Government Delegate	5 min
Transition Video	“How do I fight against corruption in my community?”	2min
Panel discussion	UNODC Delegate: obligations, institutional framework for corruption prevention Afghan Civil Society Delegate: From grassroots to national level action: religious actors, civil society and media standing up against corruption Ombudsperson Ghizaal Haress (TBC): How COVID-19 rocked the rule of law and promoted corruption. A test for Afghan anti-corruption institutions. Independent Anti-Corruption Expert: Using evidence and innovation to curb corruption: what has and has not worked elsewhere H.E. Farid Hamidi, Attorney General (TBC): The role of justice and law enforcement in curbing corruption Moderator – Romana Schweiger, UNAMA	30 min
Discussion	Statements from the floor (1 min each)	30 min
Concluding remarks	HE Alison Blake, UK Ambassador	5 min
Closing Video	“Why is my future better without corruption?”	2min