

Henry R. Jackelen

Remarks at the opening of the international conference "Anticorruption
Policies and Practices in South East Europe"

Sofia, December 10th, 2008

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Colleagues and Friends,

By resolution 58/4 of 31 October 2003, the General Assembly designated 9 December as International Anti-Corruption Day. This decision was taken in order to raise awareness of corruption and of the role of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in combating and preventing it.

On December 9th 2004, the first commemoration of the International Anticorruption Day took place all over the world. Since then, we have witnessed powerful slogans and innovative public awareness raising campaigns to promote the principles of the CAC and to call to governments' and citizens' engagement to fight corruption.

Today, December 9th 2008, we commemorate for yet another year the anticorruption day, admitting that while there are signs of growing intolerance toward corruption and more and more politicians and chief executives are being tried and convicted, the surveys in many places continue to show that people believe corruption is deeply embedded in their countries.

Unfortunately this is a relentless public perception in the region of South East Europe, which is often called a territory of corrupt business practices and of conflict of interests. I hope, therefore, that meetings like today's international conference on "Anticorruption policies and practices in South East Europe" are best opportunity for the representatives of this region to speak for themselves

against the prevailing stereotypes. I hope good examples will be shared from across the region on tackling one of the world's biggest challenges.

From my part, I would like to share briefly a best practice that originates from the joint efforts of many stakeholders in Bulgaria to collectively fight corruption. It started two years ago, when the Bulgarian Global compact network in partnership with the biggest associations and organizations of the Bulgarian business, decided to make one, single, concrete step against corruption, namely – to suggest introduction of legislative changes that restrain the size of cash payments above 10 000 BGN.(EUR 5000). The proposal was thoroughly prepared by experts and was preceded by specially designed questionnaire addressed to companies – members of the business associations and was based on the analysis of the current national legislation and comparative review of existing European practices. The proposal, endorsed by the members and partners of the Global Compact network, was submitted to the Parliamentary Commission against corruption for further deliberations and actions. I am pleased to report that the members of the Civil society council to the parliamentary commission were and still are very supportive to the idea and the proposal. The Parliamentary commission convened no less than three public hearings and discussions on the proposal and requested the opinions of other standing parliamentary commissions as well as of other stakeholders. I believe that we reach the point from which a strong will and committed leadership could ensure a final success of the initiative that is a perfect example of collective action against corruption involving business, parliamentarians and civil society actors.

Let me conclude my words by quoting parts of the UN SG Ban Ki-moon message on the International Anticorruption Day: “The world is reeling from a global financial crisis, caused in part by greed and corruption. Confidence in the financial system has been battered. The integrity of many banks has been called into question. Many people have lost their life savings.

This is bad enough, yet another, silent financial crisis afflicting the world's poorest people attracts far less attention. Every year across the developing world, billions of dollars that are badly needed for health care, schools, clean water and

infrastructure are stolen or lost through bribes and other misdeeds. This makes it harder to provide basic services and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It denies people their fundamental human rights.

It is not only governments and financial institutions that need to do more to prevent corruption and strengthen integrity. Corruption affects us all. It weakens democratic institutions, undermines the rule of law and enables terrorists to finance their nefarious work. On this International Day, let us all do our part to strengthen integrity, play by the rules, and turn the tide against this global menace. As UNODC's anti-corruption campaign states, your "no" counts.

Thank you!