

## **Rapport: UN Agencies connecting with Academics and the Civil Society UN Colloquia - Session V: Corruption**

By Johanna Damboeck

### **Speakers:**

Pavel Nechala - Transparency International Slovakia

Adam Foeldes - Transparency International Hungary

Martini Kreutner - Transparency International Austria

Mirella Dummar Frahi - UNODC: Chair of Civil Affairs office of UNODC

Dimitri Vlassis - UNODC

Maximilian Edelbacher - ACUNS (Moderator)

Gregory Weeks - Webster University Vienna

The discussion begins with the question if it is corruption or awareness of corruption that is increasing. Mr. Vlassis (UNODC) answers, that we as a society have entered a new phase, especially concerning the way we deal and perceive corruption. There has been a shift of attitude and a lower tolerance of corruption in society. In the past, for many academics and individuals, the easy way to deal with many problems and also with corruption was to blame culture for it. Thus, it was not possible to speak about corruption – as culture was used as an explanation of having corruption, and corruption was seen as a cultural thing, nothing could be done about. Nowadays, a characteristic of this "new phase" is the changing nature of how society perceives corruption. Mr. Vlassis continued, speaking about the anti-corruption Convention. The purpose of this Convention was to prevent the rise of corruption and to continue to establish a no-corruption culture. So far, more than 2/3 of UN members have become parties to this Convention. Also because of this Convention, we can speak of a real progress in fighting corruption nowadays. Nevertheless, even though there is progress, at the same time we should not delude ourselves that corruption will be dedicated tomorrow. Corruption remains to be a very important topic on the political and societal agenda. This progress can be measured through the implementation of a review mechanism, under which two other parties review one party of the anti-corruption Convention. So far, 60 reviews have been completed and UNODC has a good picture of the way enforcement of anti-corruption measures is made. Concluding, he said that he was pleasantly surprised, with which seriousness countries were supporting the Convention. Answering the question of Mr. Edelbacher, if awareness building, transparency and accountability were enough in the fight against Corruption, Mr. Vlassis explains that these things are certainly not enough. Nevertheless, they make a good start. Nowadays, a trend is consolidated: the attention does not lie with law enforcement anymore, but with prevention, as the prevention of corruption is a long-term concept. Another key element to fight corruption is education, as an anti-corruption mentality has to be established. To make a continuous effort over time, the member of stakeholder has to be involved in the fight against corruption (civil society, the private sector, politicians, academics).

Ms. Dummar-Frahi (UNODC) gives a presentation on the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs). Civil society organisations involve NGOs and professional organisations. The importance of the topic can also be seen in the anti-corruption Convention, where a whole article was dedicated to the participation of society. Furthermore, Ms. Dummar-Frahi added that raising the awareness of civil society was a very important issue. She gives two examples, confirming the importance of civil society: First, in Bangladesh, an anti-corruption NGO in Bangladesh raised the awareness of society, saying that corruption is a crime and is not accepted anymore. Second, in India, Zero Rupee Notes and leaflets were distributed to the public, drawing attention to available alternatives to corruption. Furthermore, Ms. Dummar-Frahi explains, that the

specific role of CSOs lies with the promotion and the ratification of the convention, in monitoring, reporting and whistle-blowing. In this process, UNCAC provides education and training and promotes a strategic engagement between the UN and civil society.

Mr. Kreutner (Transparency International Austria) is convinced that tremendous progress has been made so far concerning the fight against corruption. Nevertheless, there is a need for a broader conceptualisation of corruption. As corruption is a sociological phenomenon, it also has to be addressed sociologically. The first step would be to accept that we have to stop the blaming and shaming issue. What we need is international cooperation, but also cooperation between generations. Another important point is training and technical assistance. As a good example in the fight against corruption, Mr. Kreutner brings forward an example of Hong Kong. This country was in a very bad condition a few years before, but now it is among the countries with the lowest corruption rate. Corruption is not any longer a phenomenon of the public sector; the private sector also has to be involved. Furthermore, Mr. Kreutner suggests, that the international anti-corruption Academy may be a good forum for helping firms to understand corruption and to fight against it. Concluding, Mr. Kreutner confirms, that 57 entities are already parties of the anti-corruption Convention. It can be seen, that there is definitely a momentum in the arena among states and civil society. Furthermore, he mentions the tendency in the last few years that the media reports only on the insufficiency in the fight against corruption, and not on the successful actions already taken. Clearly, the media has to change its attitude and should also report on positive aspects of the fight against corruption. Concluding, Mr. Kreutner speaks about a future jurisdiction for corruption cases in domestic jurisdiction, as corruption is indeed a very big problem these days.

Mr. Weeks (Webster University) began his presentation by acknowledging the importance of statistics and data in relation to corruption. He then presented some of his research findings. His main findings concern: corruption and humanitarian aid and the measurement of the impact of corruption. Corruption is acknowledged in the humanitarian aid programmes, but it is still a problem as it is difficult to say how much aid is misused. Today, the most comprehensive work is made by GO and NGO- research based on private aid workers' experiences. Generally, Corruption is defined as driving public resources, dedicated to the community away from the society. However, what corruption really is differs from culture to culture. Furthermore, Mr. Weeks affirms the current international anti-corruption Convention and promotes further measures, as corruption takes away important funds from humanitarian aid's budgets, with the result that some money will never reach the people for which it was given. Concerning the measurement of corruption, Mr. Weeks noted, that such a measurement is not possible, as corruption does have a broader effect than just taking the funds away.

Mr. Adam Foeldes (Transparency International Hungary - TIH) presented the work of THI concerning the fight against corruption. The most important work they do is advocacy. That means to implement better laws, fairer recruitment procedures and better working conditions in many sectors in Hungary. Second, research is undertaken so that the reality can be grasped. In this process, TIH, acknowledges the academia. Third, monitoring is undertaken to understand, how international laws are implemented. In this process, volunteers are send to a country who then collect material and calculate the costs of the damage of corruption. Fourth, TIH raises awareness of corruption in Hungary. Fifth, TIH established an advocacy and legal advice centre for people who are concerned with corruption in their workplace and need advice, how they should deal with it. Focusing on the conference, Mr. Foeldes stated that the UN has also corruption within their system. Advocacy, awareness raising and research may help to fight against corruption also within the UN system. As many people are already aware of corruption, Mr. Foeldes suggested that we should focus on alternatives of corruption and on education.

Mr. Nechala (Transparency International Slovakia - TIS) presented his work, done in Slovakia. The focus of his work was projects on system change. This involved the establishment of a big coalition with more than one hundred NGOs. These activities turned out to be very successful. TIS is also engaged in reviewing governments and measuring the corruption rate of them. Nowadays, this project is undertaken in many cities and did even obtain an UN-Award. Furthermore, Mr. Nechala explains that the current government of Slovakia is very active in fighting corruption, as, for example, all governmental projects have to be on the Internet. Generally, Mr. Nechala thinks that international treaties are very successful in fighting against corruption in many countries. Concluding, he explains his thoughts on future plans. One concerns an improved reviewing process of state companies. Furthermore, Mr. Nechala proposed to have a special Court on Corruption, as there is no other way to effectively prosecute corruption in very corrupt countries.