Long Session Report

Session Title: Opening Ceremony
Date & Time: 22 October, 10:00
Report prepared by: Christine Hosack, Programme Coordinator
Business Integrity, Transparency International

Session coordinated by: Name, Position, Organisation

Moderated by: Perneille Enggaard

Experts:
Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Prime Minister, Denmark
Ashraf Ghani, President, Afghanistan
Huguette Labelle, Chair, International Anti-Corruption Conference Council
Delia Matilde Ferreira Rubio, Chair of the Board, Transparency International
Natascha Linn Felix, Chair, Transparency International Denmark

What were the aims of the session and corruption risks?

The opening ceremony is the welcome event of the IACC with welcome
speech by the Country host – Denmarks Prime Minister – the President of Afghanistan, the IACC Chair, the Chair of the TI Board and the Chair of TI Denmark.

Summary of panellists’ contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

The Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, opened the conference with his welcome remarks, highlighting his gratitude for having the opportunity to host the 18th IACC, especially considering that several years have passed since the IACC has last been held in the global north.

He thanked everyone for making their way to Denmark, a small country that has managed to combine very low levels of corruption with social trust and well-functioning institutions. These are characteristics the country shares with its Nordic neighbours, which is why he welcomed the Nordic Pillar in the IACC programme as a way to bring valuable insights into the discussions.

The Prime Minister admitted that despite these achievements, no country is free of corruption and Denmark too has room for improvement. Within the last months, the country witnessed its own examples of money laundering and what seems to be fraud with public means, shocking the Danish public who is not used to this kind of issues. Fraud and money laundering, as Denmark has experienced it undermine one of the most important pillars in a society, the trust in institutions, companies and each other. This is very damaging for a country, as mistrust creates instability.

This is why the fight against corruption is so important for the stability of societies. Thus, instead of claiming to be flawless, Mr. Rasmussen called to acknowledge the challenges countries face and insist on openness and transparency. To do this, governments must protect independent watchdogs who hold the people in power to account, in many cases under dangerous conditions. The Prime Minister highlighted his admiration and respect for those activists and journalists and assured them that Denmark supports their “vision of an open and operational system that holds people accountable in accordance with the law. No one above. No one beyond.”

He expressed his hope that coming to Denmark will bring everyone
closer to that vision by working together across civil society, journalists, academia and representatives from both the public and the private sector. This kind of cooperation has been working for a long time in Denmark through the realization that when sectors come together, they can make a lasting difference. He wished everyone successful and productive days filled with fruitful discussions and with hope of a better future.

(Full speech: http://www.stm.dk/_p_14749.html)

Subsequently the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, addressed the audience in a video message, speaking about the many reforms his government has initiated to break the vicious cycle of corruption. Although the fight against corruption is a complicated one that requires cultural, the national anti-corruption strategy has shown some good results.

The introduced reforms have affected many areas of the public and private sectors, including public procurement, justice and law enforcement institutions, the office of the Attorney General, the defence department, customs, the financial sector, as well as the private sector. In addition to these reforms, the government passed a whistle-blower protection law and supports the work of journalists and activists to protect those who have the courage to report corruption.

Remembering his government’s commitment at the Anti-Corruption Summit in London to turn the promise of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in to reality, President Ghani talked about the progress made since 2016. The country has established a forum, developed an action plan that includes thirteen commitments and set up an active Open Government Secretariat, which publicly reports on progress. As part of this commitment to OGP, the government has opened the legislative, audit and contracting processes. The President also introduced the governments future commitments, including institutionalizing the Open Government values, establishing a public register for beneficial ownership of companies, including the exchange of data with partners, establishing an independent anti-corruption commission and increasing the efforts to simplify service delivery through a one-stop-shop mechanism.

President Ghani highlighted a new commitment to transparent and fair
elections, which is why biometric data and voter registration will be used for the elections. Next year Afghanistan will see a new government and a renewed long-term anti-corruption strategy. Still this year, the country will have a new parliament and the President committed to engage them in the fight against corruption.

While moving the reform agenda forward, Afghanistan is mindful of the serious and many challenges ahead. However, he believes in the “noble idea passed from generation to generation that the path to posterity is through justice and the rule of law”.

Huguette Labelle, the Chair of the IACC Council welcomed the over 1500 participants from over 100 countries and expressed her gratitude to Denmark’s Prime Minister, government and people for hosting the IACC. She started her opening remarks with a minute of silence for the activists and journalists who have lost their lives fighting those in power since the last conference in Panama.

At the 17th IACC, the anti-corruption community came together to define its work until now and the ways in which this work would be most effective in a world that threatens to limit freedom. Two years later, we have to seeing with great concern that these trends continue with polarized politics, populism and radicalism fulling violence. This environment creates mistrust in government institutions, business and their leaders.

The devastating effects of corruption, including the economic costs that are estimated at USD 2.6 trillion and its potential to destabilize countries and feed conflict it is all too clear that the efforts of the anti-corruption community are essential. With the perpetrators organized in networks that cannot survive without corruption, the organizations fighting corruption need increase the efforts to starve their resources. This will need to include the banking sector if money laundering is to be tackled.

Ms Labelle emphasized that we have the global policy tools and the international conventions to fight corruption. The global adoption of the SDGs is another step in the right direction and meeting goal 16 is essential for the achievement of all other goals. However, what is needed now is implementation. What is needed action to give effect to these measures, through citizen engagement, freedom of press,
independent judiciary, and ethical businesses. At international level a lot of what is required to support and continue the implementation in more vigorous ways is present. Now the international community must come together to support citizens, activities and journalists who are fighting corruption on the ground and who face many threats. The international community must work together to ensure that the theme of this IACC becomes a reality, because the world’s people deserve no less.

Transparency International’s Chair of the Board, Delia Ferreira Rubio, showed her agreement with Huguette Labelle, pointing out that Transparency International and many other organizations and individuals have worked hard over the past 25 years and have succeeded in putting in place the infrastructure to fight corruption through international conventions, laws, and anti-corruption agencies that have been established in many countries. However, in an increasingly complex world with populists capturing not only the agenda but the narrative of anti-corruption, with the powerful abusing their power, and with a lack of trust in institutions and business, the space for civil society and media freedom is shrinking. This has led to a world in which governments transform watchdog institutions into lapdogs for them and attack dogs against activists and journalists.

Pointing to the list of commitments, declarations, and promises in place, she emphasized that “we are fed up with promises. We need action now!” Instead of more commitments, we need AIR. A for Action, I for Implementation, and R for Reporting. Making an appeal for action to the audience, she ensured that Transparency International, its chapters and individual members are ready to track implementation.

Closing the welcoming remarks, the Chair of TI Denmark thanked all participants for coming and the Danish government for hosting the IACC. She emphasized again that the last weeks and months in Denmark gave numerous reminders that no country is an island when it comes to corruption. Everyone has a role to play and everyone has a price to pay. Although Denmark has long been in the top ranks of the Corruption Perception Index, the control systems failed, allowing individuals to steel from the public. That a Danish bank has allowed money laundering shows that Denmark cannot see itself as an island anymore and she understands Danmarks’ decision to hosting the IACC
as a sign that the country has recogni\ns its own role.

As an outcome of the high-level political forum that is held during the first day of the IACC, Denmark will produce a national anti-corruption action plan, which is the first such plan for the country. She expressed her hope that when the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) will visit Denmark again in the coming months they will find an action plan that addresses their previous recommendations.

She completed her remarks by pointing out that when it comes to corruption there is much more at play than rules and regulations and it takes collective efforts and energy to make sure that corruption can be fought together.

Main outcomes of session (include the highlights and interesting questions from the floor)

The infrastructure to fight corruption is in place. What is needed is not more commitments but implementation and action.

No country is free of corruption and everyone nation needs to play its part in the fight against corruption.

In an increasingly complex world with shrinking civil society space and media freedom, collective efforts by governments, business, civil society, academia, and media are necessary to fight corruption.

Key recommendations and concrete follow-up actions

Use the IACC for fruitful discussions and inspiration for action.
Key Insights for the future of the anti-corruption agenda
(including Game Changing ideas/ suggestions/ actions from
the session)

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<td>• Freedom of press</td>
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<td>• Independent judiciary</td>
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<td>• Collective efforts</td>
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Rapporteur’s name and date submitted
Christine Hosack, 06 November

This Long Report needs to be submitted by 7 November