

Message of Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the occasion of the International Day against Corruption, 9 December

Corruption is not some vast impersonal and inevitable force. It is a crime committed by people who decide to break the rules for their own gain.

In the case of bribery, there are two guilty parties – the person who offers the bribe, and the other who accepts it. One word can prevent this criminal act: ‘no’.

The theme of anti-corruption day 2007 is that your ‘no’ counts.

If someone *asks* you for a small contribution – otherwise known as a bribe – to facilitate a process, just say ‘no’.

If someone *offers* you a bribe to get something done, reject it.

These may seem like small acts, but they all make a difference. They stop the rot of a culture of dishonesty. They prevent fraud, abuse of office, and can even save lives. Your ‘no’ counts.

Your ‘no’ counts when you vote against corrupt politicians, stay clear of dishonest businesses, or blow the whistle on corruption at work.

Public officials, your ‘no’ counts when you refuse to accept bribes in return for influence and access.

Judges, your ‘no’ counts when you refuse a pay-off to pervert the course of justice.

Teachers and parents, explain to children how their ‘no’ counts so that the next generation will have no tolerance for corruption.

Anti-corruption bodies, your ‘no’ should be louder than most in order to help societies build integrity and prevent corruption. Governments must provide such agencies with the independence and resources to be able to say ‘no’ more often.

Banks, say ‘no’ to laundering the proceeds of crime or harbouring stolen assets. The Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative, launched this year by the World Bank and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, will help governments reduce the chance of having their assets stolen, and will help the people get their money back. In this way, we can all say ‘no’ to kleptocrats who think they can get away with plundering the nation’s wealth.

These are all individual acts of courage and integrity that can stop corruption. Next time someone tries to buy a favour from you, don’t forget: your ‘no’ counts.