Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption

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Consideration of ways and means to achieve the objectives of the Conference of the States Parties in accordance with article 63, paragraphs 1 and 4-7, of the United Nations Convention against Corruption

Data collection and analysis

Note by the Secretariat**

1.   Pursuant to article 61 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (General Assembly resolution 58/4, annex), on the collection, exchange and analysis of information on corruption, the results of the meeting of the open-ended expert group on ways and means of improving crime data collection, research and analysis with a view to enhancing the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other relevant international entities (E/CN.15/2006/4) is brought to the attention of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The meeting of the expert group was held in Vienna from 8 to 10 February 2006, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/23 of 22 July 2005.

2.   During the meeting of the expert group, it was suggested that a collection of existing measuring options, methodologies and related instruments could be prepared for consideration by the Conference of the States Parties.

3.   The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems,[1] collects administrative statistics on crimes of corruption, as well as on persons

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* CAC/COSP/2006/1.

** Submission of the document was delayed because of the need to reflect the latest developments and take into account informal consultations.

[1] The United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems started in the late 1970s and is currently being carried out every two years. The questionnaire for the Ninth Survey (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/crime_survey_ninth.html), covering the period 2003-2004, consisted of four parts, dealing with primarily statistical information on the main components of the criminal justice system (police, prosecution, courts and prisons).

prosecuted, sentenced, and imprisoned for such crimes.[2] Owing to their consensual nature, several types of corruption offences are rarely reported to the police or are dealt with by the criminal justice system. Consequently, criminal justice statistics on that phenomenon are scarce. Nevertheless, several countries responding to the Survey questionnaire provide information on crimes of corruption.

4.   The measurement of corruption is often based on surveys aimed at capturing the experiences and/or perceptions of citizens, households, public officials and businesses. The results of such a method may be affected by the varying cultural and social environments of different countries. Levels of tolerance towards the phenomenon, irrespective of existing legislation, may be higher or lower depending on that environment. Individuals surveyed may or may not consider bribery and corruption to be more or less acceptable behaviour in everyday life, and they may or may not be inclined to acknowledge having had such experiences. Further, a bribe may mean the difference between suffering a loss and enjoying a privilege. Thus, not all respondents may see corruption as a form of victimization. It is also difficult to assess whether increased awareness or the stigmatization of corruption in a given country results in greater readiness or greater reluctance to provide responses to such surveys.

5.   It is possible to identify two main groups of survey indicators: those that measure perception and those that measure experience. Perception-based measurements of corruption are based on surveys that ask respondents how they perceive the level of corruption in their country. Although such measurements are usually valid and trustworthy, there is a risk of inaccuracy. Corruption indicators that are based on personal experiences with corruption seem to offer greater potential for comparison. Still, their validity and precision depend on the questions asked, and their trustworthiness and accuracy depend on the methodology used in carrying out the survey.[3]

6.   Perception indicators are often aggregated in composite indices such as the annual Corruption Perceptions Index, published by Transparency International, and the World Bank governance indicators,[4] which also measure, among other things, the ability of countries to control corruption. The World Economic Forum prepares similar indices, based on surveys of chief executive officers of large companies, in

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[2] The questionnaire for the Ninth Survey defined "bribery and/or corruption" as "requesting and/or accepting material or personal benefits, or the promise thereof, in connection with the performance of a public function for an action that may or may not be a violation of law and/or promising as well as giving material or personal benefits to a public officer in exchange for a requested favour".

[3] Erlend Berg, "How should corruption be measured?", Master of Science essay, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2001.

[4] See D. Kaufmann, A. Kraay and M. Mastruzzi, "Governance Matters V: Governance Indicators for 1996-2005", September 2006, available at the website of the World Bank (http://www.worldbank.org). In the period 1999-2000, the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey, developed jointly by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, surveyed over 4,000 firms in 22 countries with economies in transition. It examined a wide range of interactions between firms and the State, including several aspects of corruption, such as the payment of bribes.

order to identify obstacles to business, among which corruption figures prominently.[5]

7.   Indices of the perception of corruption base their results for individual countries on data drawn from different polls and surveys conducted by various organizations. Because such indices produce simple categorizations, they are especially attractive to the media, which has a preference for oversimplification. However, such a comprehensive index might be based on various individual surveys, which may not target corruption as such but, rather, overall vulnerability to corruption. A low score in such an index might be due not to a greater presence of corruption but to other factors, such as institutional weaknesses, insufficient rule of law or the lack of or poor quality of data. In addition, oversimplified indicators provide no direct link between the performance of a Government and the level of corruption in a country. As a result, perception indicators offer no guidance on what should be done to address the situation.

8.   Subjective indicators are typically found in victimization surveys addressing the issue of the corruption of public officials. Crime victim surveys developed at the international level over the past several decades with the involvement of UNODC and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute[6] include modules on corruption aimed at capturing the experiences of households, individuals and businesses.

9.   Interestingly, research has shown that there is little correlation between the perception and the experience of corruption. For example, surveys carried out in Bulgaria and other South-Eastern European countries within the framework of the Southeast European Legal Development Initiative (http://www.seldi.net) show that the prevalence of personal experiences of corruption tends to be much lower than the perceived prevalence of corruption would suggest.

10.   UNODC and the Center for the Study of Democracy jointly organized the Workshop on Measuring and Monitoring Corruption and Anti-Corruption, held in Sofia in June 2005, to identify basic parameters for measuring corruption. The Workshop concluded that corruption measurement should initially remain moderate and focused in scope and objectives and that measuring mechanisms must strike a balance between the need for reliable data and the cost of data collection. However, it was noted that the consideration of costs should not be allowed to undermine accuracy. Further, it was suggested that measuring mechanisms should seek to avoid duplication as far as possible without putting the legitimacy of the exercise at risk.

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[5] See the annual Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum. The Report is based in part on the Executive Opinion Survey, which addresses the issue of corruption.

[6] Those surveys are the International Crime Victim Survey, the International Crime Business Survey, the Crime and Corruption Business Survey and the European Survey on Crime and Safety. Since 1989, at least one of those surveys has been carried annually out in more than 80 countries.