

CCPCJ 2022 Expert Discussions on crimes that affect the environment

*Keynote*

14 February 2022

**Topic:** Focus on corruption prevention as a fundamental need for preventing these crimes

- Thank you, Mr. Chair.
- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
- Our environment and our planet are currently under threat. The strategies that are being devised and implemented to address these threats can and will be undermined by corruption.
- Corruption is the key enabler for crimes that affect the environment. It helps criminals to commit, conceal and avoid conviction for their crimes. Criminal individuals and networks rely on corruption to succeed and to increase their profits.
- Therefore, as today's focus is on prevention, I am pleased to start the discussion by reminding ourselves that the prevention of corruption must be a key element in the broader efforts to prevent crimes that affect the environment.
- For the foreseeable future, the world's economies will depend on the equitable utilization of natural resources, including wildlife, forests and fish. If the proceeds from the sale of national resources are diverted into the hands of

criminals and corrupt public officials, poverty and instability will persist. However, when the public receives the benefits of these resources, countries have the chance to thrive.

- When officials become corrupted, their interests shift from sustainability to short-term profit. The environment is damaged, resources are lost, people lose trust in government, and aggrieved communities become restive. It is therefore our collective responsibility to ensure that products taken directly from the wild are harvested sustainably, in markets regulated by public officials who uphold the public trust.
- Ladies and Gentlemen - this is a race against time.
- Urgent action and political commitment are required if we are serious about protecting our planet's ecosystems and curbing biodiversity and forest loss. We need to build momentum. We need to embed - collectively and firmly - anti-corruption as a key tool to preventing crimes that affect the environment into the global crime prevention and criminal justice agenda. And we must do this now, before the endangered and critically endangered species are gone for good.
- A strong preventive response to corruption is key, considering the detrimental and often irreversible consequences of crimes that affect the environment.

- Let me give you an example. Let's imagine a situation where legislators are influenced to adopt weak forest management legislation, or to amend laws so that the otherwise protected indigenous communities' forests can be accessed for mining purposes. Or that land certificates are issued in exchange for a bribe. All these corrupt acts can result in the deforestation of primary forests. Consequently, natural habitats, ecosystems, and wildlife are lost. And even if the criminals are caught, and the corrupt legislator serves time in prison, the environmental damage that their actions have caused cannot be repaired by any time served in prison nor by any monetary sanction. Therefore, first and foremost, such acts need to be prevented.
- Since 2016, UNODC supports countries in their efforts to prevent and respond to corruption that facilitates crimes that affect the environment. Key range States have begun to conduct corruption risk assessments and develop and implement risk mitigation strategies for their wildlife, forest and fisheries management authorities, and other relevant authorities. Institutional and structural changes have resulted from these processes, and accountability and transparency measures have been strengthened, resulting in fewer opportunities for corrupt acts to take place, and take root.

- UNODC is also increasing global understanding on corruption related to crimes that affect the environment, and has developed several knowledge products that provide guidance in this regard. However, more research, data and statistics are needed as they contribute to better understanding of the forms, manifestations and scale of such corruption, and how it erodes conservation and sustainable management efforts. Increased knowledge will help inform more targeted responses.
- Ladies and gentlemen, progress is not only possible, it is necessary. Many Member States have showcased successes and good practices. But, as I said at the outset of my remarks, we are in a race against time. Greater efforts are required by States and all other relevant stakeholders.
- During the discussions in the next couple of days, I invite you to keep in mind that any effort to prevent and combat crimes that affect the environment must address corruption. Only when corruption is addressed, can equitable and sustainable access to natural resources be ensured.
- Thank you for the opportunity, and I wish you fruitful discussions.