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**Conference room paper submitted by the Government of United States of America: Road map to strengthening the role of non-governmental actors (young people, academia and civil society) in the fight against corruption\*\***

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## Road map to strengthening the role of non-governmental actors (young people, academia and civil society) in the fight against corruption

*This road map is based on recommendations resulting from three regional dialogues for academia, youth and civil society held between February – October 2023, organized within the framework of UNODC’s Global Resource on Anti-Corruption Education and Youth Empowerment (GRACE) initiative and funded by the United States of America. The United States is submitting this conference room paper on behalf of those who worked to develop road map. The United States Government neither endorses nor opposes any of the positions, conclusions, or recommendations contained herein, and encourages all States Parties to consider this road map as they continue to implement their UNCAC obligations.*

### Introduction

1. The United Nations Convention against Corruption is 20 years old this year and this anniversary represents an opportunity to collectively reflect on the global fight against corruption and on the role played by non-governmental actors in strengthening anti-corruption efforts worldwide.
2. The important role that individuals and groups from outside the public sector, such as young people, academia and civil society, play in the prevention of and the fight against corruption is highlighted in the political declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its special session against corruption held in 2021 and in article 13 of the Convention against Corruption. The importance of promoting the contribution of the public to decision-making processes and the importance of public information activities and education in strengthening the fight against corruption is also highlighted in article 13 of the Convention.
3. To further amplify the voices of non-governmental actors, the Global Resource for Anti-Corruption Education and Youth Empowerment (GRACE) initiative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), with the generous support of the Government of the United States of America, organized three regional dialogues involving young people,<sup>1</sup> academia and civil society in 2023 to build on the output of the political declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its special session against corruption held in 2021.
4. The dialogues were held in Latin America in February 2023, in Africa in June 2023 and in Europe in October 2023 (attended by stakeholders from Europe and Asia). The dialogues involved participants from 50 countries and resulted in a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the inclusion and participation of civil society in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention against Corruption. The dialogues also provided a platform for sharing views and cooperation on development, and led to an improved understanding of the different regional approaches used to prevent and counter corruption. The recommendations that resulted from the dialogues form the basis of the present Road map.

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<sup>1</sup> While the term “young people” is used throughout the Road map, it should be noted that this is not a homogeneous group. Most notably, in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, young women and girls continue to face more obstacles to accessing education than young men and boys, and they more frequently miss out on education opportunities. This not only threatens decades of progress made towards gender equality, but also puts girls around the world at risk of adolescent pregnancy, early and forced marriage, and violence. Not being able to access school closes a window to a better future and creates a roadblock on the path towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Therefore, the references to “young people” in the Road map pertain to young people of all genders but acknowledge the gender-specific impact of corruption on young women and girls.

5. The purpose of the Road map is twofold. First, the Road map presents a collaborative vision of how to meet the challenges faced in fighting corruption, bringing together ideas and proposals from young people, academia and civil society. Second, the Road map invites Member States to support the greater involvement of non-governmental actors in the fight against corruption and to collectively shape a future where integrity is the norm, not the exception.

### **Cross-cutting priorities in the group dialogues**

6. Before outlining the content of the Road map, which consists of recommendations provided by individual stakeholders (young people, academia and civil society), it is important to acknowledge that a set of common priorities was identified by all three groups. These common priorities, which are set out below, help to provide an overview of the gaps in the anti-corruption landscape:

(a) **Inclusive collaboration.** The success of anti-corruption efforts worldwide depends on the will of States to collaborate constructively and transparently with non-governmental actors. As such, non-governmental actors call for the direct representation of historically underrepresented and excluded groups, ensuring inclusiveness in relation to age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability status, sexual orientation, education and national origin. This collaboration extends to the co-creation, implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption policies and reforms. In all three dialogues, addressing corruption was perceived as a collective effort that requires government and public sector authorities, universities, civil society, the private sector and young people to work together and combine their expertise and ability to independently scrutinise public sector anti-corruption efforts;

(b) **Capacity-building, empowerment and allocating resources.** Non-governmental actors recognize the importance of training and empowering young people, academia and civil society organizations. Non-governmental actors believe that UNODC has an essential role in facilitating cross-regional learning and collaboration, which allows stakeholders to share best practices and experiences. This can help identify strategies that have been successfully adapted to different legal and cultural contexts, enhancing the overall impact of anti-corruption efforts. Non-governmental actors also strongly urge all States to allocate resources, including financial resources, to the implementation of the provisions detailed in the Convention against Corruption and the recommendations resulting from the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, as well as to strengthening the participation of non-governmental actors in the related implementation processes. To complement this development, non-governmental actors would like to see opportunities for additional capacity-building and technical assistance, which they can help co-deliver;

(c) **Raising public awareness, education, research and advocacy.** Non-governmental actors call for greater public engagement in the fight against corruption, awareness-raising around the issue and advancing anti-corruption education, as well as for the promotion of anti-corruption values in communities and their integration into society at large. This extends to advocating for anti-corruption policies that help create an environment conducive to real change. The three dialogues also drew attention to the practice of disaggregating data (e.g. by gender and level of education), which can help policymakers better understand the different impact of corruption and anti-corruption mechanisms on individual groups. The development of indicators for assessing progress (such as a framework to measure the impact of anti-corruption efforts), increased data collection and the use of empirical evidence in policymaking, and public access to high-quality research, are also key factors on which the recommendations are based;

(d) **Transparency and accountability.** Young people, academia and civil society call for greater transparency in political party funding, better access to information and more openness in disclosing information, as well as for non-

governmental actors to be consulted regarding proposed policies and anti-corruption measures. In the three dialogues, attention was drawn in particular to increasing government accountability with regard to public spending and transparency in public procurement processes;

(e) **Legal frameworks.** Acknowledging the differences between legal frameworks, young people, academia and civil society highlight the need for robust legal foundations for anti-corruption laws that conform to the highest standards. The three groups also call for the establishment of independent mechanisms for enforcement and for effective checks and balances;

(f) **Human rights.** Non-governmental actors call for laws and mechanisms that safeguard human rights, with a particular focus on compensating victims of corruption, through either strengthening domestic legal frameworks or better advocating for the compensation of victims in asset recovery processes.

## Road map for 2024–2025

7. Given the individual and diverse needs of non-governmental actors, the following recommendations are presented separately by group (young people, academia and civil society). Within the recommendations, each group sets out objectives for consideration by Member States. The groups call upon Member States to consider acting on the recommendations.

### Recommendations: young people

8. **Empower the victims of corruption.** Recognizing that young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds are victims of corruption, there is a need for greater protection and recognition of victims of corruption. Young people call for guaranteed access to legal aid and justice, with a focus on overcoming obstacles such as systemic inequality and financial limitations. They also call for greater visibility, underlining the importance of sustainable funding for government and civil society support services in assisting young victims and whistle-blowers. Within this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Ensure access to legal aid and justice for young victims of corruption (for instance, through legal aid clinics and services for young victims that could be organized by universities and/or civil society organizations);

(b) Organize youth-focused events and awareness campaigns to raise the visibility of youth-specific challenges in society;

(c) Advocate for legal reforms and sustainable funding to protect young victims and whistle-blowers, while remaining aware of the differences between the two groups and tailoring policies and actions to each group accordingly.

9. **Facilitate greater involvement of young people in decision-making processes.** Recognizing that young people face specific challenges in relation to corruption and anti-corruption efforts, the inclusion of young people in institutional anti-corruption processes should be mandatory (e.g. through nominated youth focal points in Governments, to raise the profile of youth-specific needs, and through youth-led national advisory boards, to provide substantive input into anti-corruption strategies and policies). To enhance transparency, there should be proactive publication of data related to youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts and an accountability mechanism should be created whereby States need to provide clear justification in instances where they have not engaged young people in policymaking, such as when shaping anti-corruption policies. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Ensure the integration of young people into domestic, regional and intergovernmental processes, therefore raising the profile of youth-specific challenges and needs;

(b) Establish youth-led national advisory boards and youth focal points in Governments to facilitate continuous consultation in shaping anti-corruption strategies, policies and decision-making processes, therefore promoting meaningful youth engagement;

(c) Implement a transparent accountability system that proactively publishes institutional data on youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts;

(d) Provide financial support for initiatives promoted by various organizations, including intergovernmental organizations, that have a specific focus on meaningful youth engagement, with the aim of helping young people to increase transparency and the involvement of their peers in anti-corruption efforts.

**10. Mobilize resources to enhance the role of young people in anti-corruption efforts.** To ensure that young people have a meaningful role in anti-corruption activities, they need to be supported and financially empowered. Financial investment from Member States in youth-specific initiatives would be most effective if accompanied by a greater appreciation of the power that young people have to actively shape anti-corruption initiatives at the local, national and regional levels. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Mobilize financial, material and human resources to enhance public awareness of youth-specific needs, to support youth-to-youth advocacy and to promote the participation of young people from diverse and historically and systemically underrepresented backgrounds in anti-corruption initiatives;

(b) Invest in youth-led projects, engage in transparent dialogues with young people to better understand what types of activities have the greatest chance of success and use the knowledge of young people to shape anti-corruption products, effectively empowering young people to be equal partners in the development of anti-corruption initiatives.

**11. Raise awareness of corruption and invest in coalition-building.** There should be a heightened and creative focus on raising awareness of the negative effects of different types of corruption on young people. Furthermore, intersectional, interdisciplinary and plural groups should be established to ensure that young people are represented in policymaking. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Use a diverse range of artistic means and other forms of creative expression to engage youth groups and inform them about the negative effects of corruption and about the anti-corruption activities that they can undertake;

(b) Ensure that a diverse and representative range of demands relating to young people are visible in public discourse and State actions, encouraging the development of public understanding of the negative effects of corruption on young people from different parts of society;

(c) Amplify a diverse range of young voices and raise awareness among young people of the negative impact of corruption by funding mentorship programmes that inspire young people to take on leadership roles and become agents of change;

(d) Promote ethics, integrity and anti-corruption education at all educational levels and mentorship as key components in developing informed and committed future leaders.

**12. Support research, education and innovation involving young people.** There should be greater focus on research, education and innovation to drive anti-corruption efforts (for instance, through youth labs, workshops and hackathons, which equip young people with the skills to combat and prevent corruption). It is also important to highlight the importance of new perspectives and innovative solutions in relation to the fight against corruption, including in the form of the development of anti-corruption apps, the digitalization of content and partnering with academia, civil society and communities with regard to data collection. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Organize inclusive and accessible workshops where young people can develop innovative solutions to combat corruption. These workshops should focus on areas such as the creation of anti-corruption applications, the digitalization of educational content and the exploration of economic approaches to addressing corruption issues;

(b) Organize hackathons aimed at tackling corruption challenges, with the support of multilateral organizations and civil society. Participants can work together to develop technology-driven solutions, such as applications or online platforms, that enhance transparency and report acts of corruption;

(c) Empower young people to understand and contribute to the development of the use of artificial intelligence in the fight against corruption, while educating them on the corruption-related risks of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies;

(d) Engage young people in data collection efforts and encourage them to provide new perspectives and ideas for addressing corruption, including through cooperation with other non-governmental actors. Encourage the disaggregation of data by gender and other relevant characteristics;

(e) Work with ministries of education, higher education institutions, anti-corruption authorities and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations, to identify entry points for advancing ethics, integrity and anti-corruption education within formal and informal education settings.

#### **Recommendations: academia**

13. **Empower educators.** Meaningful partnerships with ministries of education, higher educational institutions and schools should be formed to inform education reform. Diagnostic assessments should be conducted to identify curriculum needs, while educators should be empowered to instil a culture of integrity within educational institutions and among students, and to prevent and counter corruption, including academic fraud, in educational settings. This will ensure that educational institutions and students are prepared to help prevent and counter corruption. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Establish partnerships between educators and ministries of education, anti-corruption government bodies, higher education institutions and primary and secondary schools to inform anti-corruption curricula development;

(b) Conduct regular diagnostic assessments and evaluations to identify specific curriculum needs, and tailor anti-corruption, ethics and integrity education to local and regional contexts as well as to the needs and experiences of different student groups;

(c) Invest in the capacity-building of educators in order to advance anti-corruption, ethics and integrity education, including through the training of educators and the development of tools;

(d) Promote open-access academic publications on teaching best practices, support faculty and student exchange programmes and endorse collaborative research into pedagogical approaches to teaching anti-corruption, ethics and integrity on a global scale.

14. **Use independent research and analysis to influence policy development.** Acknowledging the importance of research and data to evidence-based policymaking, independent research and analysis should be used to complement and inform government policy analysis, and to help develop progress assessment indicators. This should include facilitating agreements between academia and public institutions, drawing up essential regulations, proposing laws that help create a conducive environment for change and building alliances with key sectors. Academic symposiums and forums should also be organized to ensure that fighting corruption

remains in a prominent position on the public agenda, therefore driving policy changes. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Focus on strengthening independent research and analysis related to anti-corruption activity (for instance, by enhancing research methodologies, promoting the collection of accurate and representative data, encouraging the collection of disaggregated data by gender and developing tools for measuring corruption and its impact);

(b) Create a set of comprehensive and inclusive indicators for assessing the progress of anti-corruption efforts that can serve as a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives and guiding future activity;

(c) Foster collaboration between academic institutions at the international level to strengthen anti-corruption education and policy development globally;

(d) Provide opportunities for researchers to present relevant corruption-related research in intergovernmental settings and other forums, and to strengthen the dialogue between policymakers and academia, therefore enhancing evidence-based policymaking.

#### **15. Share academic findings through advocacy and awareness-raising.**

Resources should be allocated to strengthening the ability of academic organizations to share their findings on corruption. This communication is a core element of the awareness-raising efforts of academic institutions, helping to bridge the gap between academia and policymakers. This activity includes allocating resources and customizing anti-corruption communication strategies to ensure that anti-corruption messages reach their intended audiences. For example, collaborative partnerships with media outlets, including investigative journalists, facilitate the global dissemination of anti-corruption knowledge and research, while allocating resources to national and regional cross-sector anti-corruption forums is essential. In this context, it is necessary to:

(a) Develop and implement tailored anti-corruption communication strategies using inclusive and accessible language, and identify appropriate networks for outreach and awareness-raising;

(b) Promote the sharing of pedagogical best practices for teaching anti-corruption, ethics and integrity studies through open-access academic publications, faculty and student exchange programmes, and collaborative research efforts on a global scale;

(c) Engage in time-bound data collection projects and identify funding sources for data collection and methodology development to improve data quality.

#### **Recommendations: civil society**

**16. Facilitate greater access to information and greater scrutiny of political finance.**<sup>2</sup> To establish a stronger legal foundation for legitimate political finance, regulatory impact assessments should be integrated, legal framework evaluations with the participation of civil society should be facilitated and open consultations during the drafting of political finance procedures should be put in place. Furthermore, there is a need for user-friendly disclosure of political finance and expense monitoring to promote transparency. An independent mechanism for guaranteeing access to information should also be created, incorporating strong legal frameworks, independent appeals mechanisms and proactive online disclosure, with a strong emphasis on monitoring implementation to ensure transparency and accountability. To develop this work, it is necessary to empower civil society organizations with the ability to:

<sup>2</sup> “Political finance” is understood here as the process through which political parties finance their regular activities, how parties, candidates and non-contestants raise and spend money for election campaigns, and how this funding and spending are regulated and disclosed.

(a) Periodically assess existing legal frameworks governing political finance, involving civil society in the evaluation process, to ensure that these frameworks remain effective, transparent and aligned with international standards;

(b) Introduce an independent monitoring mechanism for political finance, containing an appeals system and a proactive online disclosure function;

(c) Conduct regulatory impact assessments to evaluate the potential impact of proposed political finance regulations and to identify potential shortcomings;

(d) Organize open consultations during the drafting of political finance procedures to encourage public input and transparency, such as town hall meetings, online platforms and expert panels;

(e) Establish an independent body responsible for enforcing political finance regulations and imposing sanctions for non-compliance, including the provision of resources to ensure effectiveness.

**17. Safeguard the rights of victims and strengthen whistle-blower legal protection.** Laws should be enacted that put in place the highest standards of victim protection. Separately, there should be stronger whistle-blower protections, recognizing the distinction between victims and whistle-blowers. Monitoring the implementation of such protections, conducting research to protect vulnerable members of society and educating victims about their rights and legal protections should be viewed as essential. In this context, it is necessary to:

With regard to victims of corruption:

(a) Conduct research to identify victims of corruption, advocate for their legal standing in order to enhance protection of their rights and develop mechanisms for compensating victims of corruption to ensure justice and restitution, where applicable;

(b) Invest in training and capacity-building programmes for victims of corruption to ensure that they are aware of their rights and the legal protection mechanisms available to them;

(c) Conduct research to better understand the different effects of corruption on victims, in particular women and people from specific groups (e.g. minority groups, young people and persons with disabilities). Assess the physical and technical accessibility of reporting channels, legal representation, courts and other relevant protections;

(d) Accelerate efforts to address the consequences of corruption for victims, particularly at the collective level. Ensure that remedies are in place for the harm and damages caused by corruption. Instruments for victim representation and compensation should be designed in the knowledge that, because of societal norms, stigma, the roles of individuals and the expectations of society, people are not always affected by corruption in the same way and that the same remedies are not universally appropriate. Therefore, explicit direct representation of women, minorities, persons with disabilities and other discriminated or excluded groups is needed.

With regard to whistle-blowers:

(a) Advocate for the enactment of comprehensive whistle-blower protection laws that meet the highest international standards, actively monitor the implementation of these laws, provide training to protect vulnerable members of society and educate whistle-blowers and institutions on their rights and responsibilities;

(b) Invest in training and capacity-building programmes to ensure that whistle-blowers are aware of their rights and the protection mechanisms that available to them;

(c) Advocate for the legal standing of whistle-blowers and work with relevant stakeholders (i.e. policymakers and ministries of justice) to ensure that whistle-



blowers do not face disproportionately punitive measures and receive universal access to a fair trial.

18. **Create an empowering and inclusive civic space.** An enabling environment should be established that allows civil society organizations to develop and deliver impactful work, where obstructive regulations are eliminated and resources for capacity-building are adequately provided. The active participation of non-governmental actors in the implementation of provisions in the Convention against Corruption and the monitoring of this process should be facilitated. This should include inviting non-governmental actors to take part in the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption and its subsidiary bodies, and addressing impunity through the criminalization of illicit enrichment, as well as engaging in evidence-based advocacy. In this context, it is necessary to help civil society organizations to:

(a) Advocate for legal protections, regulations and practices that facilitate the meaningful involvement of civil society organizations in decision-making (for instance, by creating long-lasting policy dialogues between States and civil society actors);

(b) Raise the profile of civil society reports and recommendations and ensure effective funding sources to help give the work of civil society organizations prominence;

(c) Advocate for judicial independence, transparent justice systems and unbiased investigations free from political interference, with the aim of enhancing the impartiality of the judiciary and legal proceedings;

(d) Facilitate the meaningful participation of civil society organizations in decision-making processes, including through capacity-building and training, and leverage digital tools for consultation and the integration of evidence-based insights of civil society organizations into policy development;

(e) Promote a culture of integrity and respect for human rights through educational initiatives, including curriculum integration and collaboration with educational practitioners.

## Next steps

19. The fight against corruption is a complex endeavour that is beyond the capability of Governments acting in isolation. The Road map outlines the views of non-governmental actors on the issue and details the measures to strengthen anti-corruption efforts that they wish to see realized globally, with their active inclusion and participation.

20. Through these recommendations, non-governmental actors hope that they can work with Member States and UNODC in the ongoing fight against corruption. In practice, the effectiveness of the Road map largely depends on the presence of a real and persistent commitment by Member States and intergovernmental organizations, including UNODC, to collaborate in meaningful ways with non-governmental actors to generate positive impact, and to genuinely recognize that the responsibility for preventing and combating corruption extends beyond the purview of Member States alone.

21. The upcoming anniversary of the Convention against Corruption is an opportunity to assess the progress made by all actors against the recommendations that have been put forward in the Road map. The relevance of the recommendations can be reassessed and remaining implementation gaps can be identified at the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2025.