

The tenth Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption (COSP 10), 11. – 15.12.2023, Atlanta, USA Statement by H.E. Espen Barth Eide, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

Twenty years after the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), 190 states are parties to the Convention. We must celebrate the achievement of having a near-universal legally-binding, anti-corruption instrument.

At the same time, corruption remains an existential threat to democracy and security. It undermines good governance and hinders sustainable development. Grand corruption flourishes where there are weak checks on the exercise of state executive power or undue private influence on the government.

We – the states parties to UNCAC - must collectively increase our preventive work and provide sufficient resources to investigate and prosecute corruption. We must ensure that investigators and prosecutors can carry out their work free from undue influence.

In parallel, we must assess whether we have the right tools to combat corruption.

We – the states parties to UNCAC – cannot successfully fight corruption alone. We must build on the Convention's obligations to promote the active participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector.

Unfortunately, we see that many countries are undermining *civil society organizations*, often precisely because of their anti-corruption engagement. We are deeply concerned that journalists and activists exposing corruption are being harassed, threatened, violently attacked, imprisoned, or even murdered because of their work.

We must acknowledge that anti-corruption legislative reforms often come because of corruption exposed by whistleblowers, civil society, or investigative journalists. These groups should be embraced as our partners in the fight against corruption.

They have been essential in exposing environmental crimes and their link to international organized crime and corruption, and we need them to assist us in flagging new emerging corruption risks, such as corruption in climate finance and carbon trading markets. Norway will continue to support whistleblowers and investigative journalism such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism.

Corruption is perceived to be low in Norway. We are known for efficient public administration, a solid non-politicized bureaucracy, free education, high-quality comprehensive services to citizens and enterprises, a long tradition of openness and transparency and particularly important - an independent press.

However, this year, several ministers in the Norwegian Government have been forced to resign, partly due to the mishandling of conflict-of-interest situations. This would not have surfaced if it had not been for an active free press and public access to information.

Both the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism and the evaluation report from the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption, pointed at the risk related to the conflict of interest in Norway. The Government is in the process of updating some of the relevant regulations.

Trust takes time to build but can be torn down quickly. How we deal with such critical situations is crucial. An open, inclusive, and transparent review mechanism can assist states in scrutinizing national measures against corruption and in suggesting amendments and improvements to our systems, to update our comprehensive response as corruption and related crimes develop.

As we are starting our preparations for the Fourth Financing for Development Conference in 2025, the emphasis should be on domestic resource mobilization for the financing of Sustainable Development. To succeed in this, we must jointly increase our efforts in curbing corruption, preventing tax avoidance and -evasion, disrupting illicit financial flows, and return assets more effectively.

Norway stands committed to provide technical assistance, training, and knowledge through our trusted partners. They include the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and their implementing partners Open Contracting Partnership and Open Ownership, International Centre for Asset Recovery and UNDP.

Let me close by thanking all sponsors for tabling important resolutions for this COSP (Conference of the States Parties). Norway looks forward to working with all partners in continuing our fight against corruption – and for national resource mobilization for sustainable development - in the coming years.

Thank you.