

Grand Corruption as a Major Obstacle to the SDGs

Opening remarks

Mr. John Brandolino, Director Division of Treaty Affairs

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Abu Dhabi, 16/12/2019, side-event at the 8th session of the CoSP to the UNCAC

Good morning everyone,

Ambassador Andersen,

Distinguished panellists and colleagues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, it is my great pleasure and honour to share with you some opening remarks on the links between corruption and the achievement of the SDGs at the start of this week's 8th session of the Conference of the States parties to the UNCAC.

As you all know, we only have about 10 years remaining to reach the ambitious goals set out by the international community in September 2015 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The links between corruption and illicit financial flows -- and the achievement of the SDGs -- are plain for everyone to see.

Indeed, there are a number of direct links to corruption within the SDG's – particularly SDG 16, which calls for justice and accountable and inclusive institutions, among other things.

Targets for SDG 16 include the very essence of corruption – namely, decreasing public sector bribery and tackling asset recovery and illicit financial flows.

In addition to SDG 16, many of the SDG's and their targets need to be built on the foundation of good governance and the rule of law.

And many of the goals will require significant investment of public resources.

Those investments will be undermined if corruption – particularly corruption involving vast quantities of assets - continues to adversely affect budgets and forces misguided decisions.

During a high level UN gathering in NY this summer to take stock of our progress in implementing the SDG's, the news was not too good.

Much more needs to be done over the next decade to reach our targets, particularly that of SDG 16.

One way to do better is to continue strengthening the enforcement of the UN Convention across the world.

When the rule of law is upheld, in line with the Convention, the impact on the SDGs will be noticeable.

As countries recover assets, they will be able to invest them in sectors necessary to meet the SDG targets.

At UNODC, we continue to work closely with national authorities around the world, through our Global Programme on Anti-Corruption and our StAR programme, to support capacity building for the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of corruption cases – as well as asset recovery.

We are seeing increased international cooperation among anti-corruption professionals around the world and promising prospects for more asset recovery.

Still, at the same time, the challenges to achieve the SDGs remain formidable.

In the past year, UNODC organized several expert group meetings with support from the Governments of Norway and Peru – for which we are very grateful - to look at the impact of corruption involving vast quantities of assets and at the innovative measures needed to tackle such corruption and its devastating consequences around the world.

Connections were also made to the SDG's and related paths.

For example, at the Lima expert group meeting, participants recognized corruption involving vast quantities of assets as a “threat to global peace and security, the enjoyment of human rights, a liveable climate and biodiversity”.

Among other things, discussions during those meetings touched upon the extent to which illegal logging, overfishing and wildlife crime are facilitated by corruption – and how the protection of our natural habitats goes hand in hand with preventing and combating corruption.

Gender empowerment was also a topic.

SDG Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030.

The connection of corruption to Goal 5 has not been sufficiently explored.

At the Oslo expert group meeting, experts recommended that “more gender-differentiated analyses of corruption should be undertaken by international organizations and other stakeholders”, and that “the findings of such analyses should be made publicly available to inform gender-appropriate responses.”

The link between corruption and climate change was also raised – a path and connection that will be discussed later by our UNDP colleague on this panel.

Some of these links discussed during the series of expert meetings will be touched upon by our distinguished panel during the course of this hour.

So I will leave it to them for further detail – and would like to end by encouraging all of you to keep exploring the links between corruption and the SDGs, and to act on your findings, to achieve better results in the achievement of the SDGs.

Last week, on International Anti-Corruption Day, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, “urged people

everywhere to continue to work on innovative solutions to win the battle against corruption and to ensure that precious resources serve the people of the world”.

[I would also like to underline the upcoming UN General Assembly Special Session on combatting corruption, which will take place in New York in 2021.

We hope this will provide another opportunity to further our agenda to tackle corruption effectively, as a global community.]

At UNODC, we will continue to support your efforts to tackle corruption effectively for a better world.

Thank you for your attention – apologies for not being able to stay for the entire session.