

## Ensuring protection of ACAs and their officers

Opening remarks

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Good afternoon everyone,

Dear Navin, dear Tan Sri Abu Kassim, dear Sarath, dear Dadang, dear Novel, dear friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to share with you some remarks on behalf of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in this side-event on Ensuring protection of ACAs and their officers.

ACAs and their officers are the first responders to corruption. They are in the front line in the battle against corruption. Since the early 50s in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, numerous countries around the world have established ACAs with mandates to prevent, investigate and prosecute corruption. Today, there are many ACAs in different forms and in different shapes, but they all share the same objective: to reduce and eradicate corruption. As such, they also face the same challenges. As Nuhu Ribadu, the EFCC Chair in Nigeria, once famously said: "If you fight corruption, corruption fights back."

Many of us, who have worked in the fight against corruption, have personally suffered setbacks. I know that several of the panellists here today have. Some of us, like Novel, have been harmed for life. We all serve a cause we deeply believe in. We all face tremendous struggles. The fight against corruption is more difficult than the fight against polio, tetanus, ebola, or the measles. Corruption continues to thrive despite the many attempts at eradicating it. Some say it is part of human nature, but it's no excuse. The UN Convention against Corruption is almost universally ratified. We need to keep combating corruption because corruption is so devastating for global peace and security, economic well-being, the fulfilment of our human rights and a biodiverse and liveable planet.

The fight against corruption is a fight for life, for preserving life for the generations to come. As such, ACAs and their officers are often very courageous, yet we need to protect them, as much as possible.

UNODC welcomes the establishment of the International Anti-Corruption Champion Fund under the auspices of the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities, by Malaysia, to protect ACA officers. This is a very important initiative, in line with recommendation 51 of the Oslo Statement on Corruption involving Vast Quantities of Assets. It will help to provide much needed support to those who became victimized by doing their duty in the fight against corruption. In the same vein as ACA officers need to be protected, so do ACAs themselves.

I'm very proud to share with you the first copies of the "Colombo Commentary on the Jakarta Principles for Anti-Corruption Agencies". The Colombo Commentary is the fruit of intensive discussions that took place in July 2018, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, during an expert meeting, held in follow-up to Resolution 7/6 which tasked UNODC with developing knowledge products, guidance notes and technical tools on the implementation of article 6 of the Convention. The expert meeting took place under the auspices of the President of Sri Lanka. I would like to thank Sarath Jayamanne for making this possible. The Colombo Commentary also reflects information gathered by UNODC through a survey and based on desk reviews of laws, policy documents and publications.

The Convention calls for the existence of specific anti-corruption bodies for preventing and combating corruption, and the Convention requires that these bodies be given the "necessary independence". While the sixteen principles in the Jakarta Statement on Principles for Anti-Corruption Agencies already provided useful guidance, feedback received over the years indicated that they needed more elaboration. We hope that the Colombo Commentary provides this "meat on the bones" and that it clarifies the meaning of each of the sixteen principles, including by referencing concrete examples based on country experience. The Colombo Commentary does not provide a comprehensive overview of ACAs experiences globally. Rather, it provides a snapshot of ACAs experiences that demonstrate how the Jakarta Principles are implemented in practice.

It is important for all Jakarta Principles to be fully implemented in order to ensure a robust framework protecting the ACA against undue influence. As I have previously stated: The Jakarta principles are a like a house of cards, 16

cards stacked onto each other. If you pull one out, the whole house will fall down. Agencies that are fully compliant with the Jakarta principles, will most definitely be very effective agencies. Partially compliant agencies are likely to be exposed to undue political interference constraining their effectiveness and independence.

The Colombo Commentary now makes it clear what is understood under each principle. I will not go into further detail, but I hope you will enjoy reading the commentary and be inspired by it. We hope the Colombo Commentary will be a useful resource in your endeavours to prevent and combat corruption effectively in your respective countries and we encourage you to actively make use of the publication.

An officially edited and designed version of the Colombo Commentary will be published in early 2020. We will have more copies to distribute then.

I would like to thank Malaysia for giving us the opportunity to present the Colombo Commentary here today.

Thank you for your attention!