

3 June 2019

5th Annual Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies Conference

Notes for opening remarks by The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

Your Excellency, honourable ministers, distinguished delegates, Commonwealth friends and colleagues....

We who are gathered here know only too well the pernicious economic, social and political impact that is wrought by entrenched corruption in the lives of people in our communities and in the lives of our nations.

International organisations, development practitioners, and leaders who are sensitive to the plight of their people and the wellbeing of their countries, all recognise that corruption undermines and undoes development.

So, in our determination truly to live up to the meaning and ambition of our name ‘Commonwealth’, corruption is a cancer we are compelled to confront.

It undermines in ways which are truly tragic the ability of our countries to deliver inclusive and sustainable economic growth and social progress.

This makes the theme for our conference as urgent as it is appropriate: ***“Transforming Words into Action: Revitalising the Fight Against Corruption”***.

Globally, we are facing a tidal wave of corruption.

The IMF estimates that bribery costs roughly 1.5 to 2 dollars trillion annually.

With such dire social and economic consequences at stake, the fight against corruption has to be a priority for all our member countries.

In 2015, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that 2 to 5 per cent of global domestic product is laundered each year, amounting to something between 800 billion and 200 trillion dollars annually.

World Bank research has revealed that corrupt public officials in developing countries receive between 20 and 40 billion dollars in bribes annually.

So, tackling corruption has to be a priority of the highest order if we are in earnest about achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - and we are.

Doing so brings multiple benefits; poverty is reduced, economic stability and growth are increased, and standards of living raised.

That is why SDG 16 incorporates specific targets relating to reducing corruption, bribery, and illicit financial flows.

And the IMF has made clear that the success of all other SDGs depends crucially on getting to grips with the corrosive cancer of corruption.

So, we all need to take swift and decisive action to improve transparency and accountability, and to build confidence that our institutions and systems are corruption-free.

That is why the Commonwealth has been active in providing practical technical assistance and development support for national anti-corruption agencies to build their effectiveness in dealing with corruption.

In our anti-corruption work we employ a three-pronged approach, which involves research, capacity-building and networking.

This is being delivered through a strategy of establishing regional anti-corruption agency networks and training centres, facilitating closer cooperation and learning towards attaining SDG 16.

The networks promote collaboration and the exchange among member countries of best practice and of practitioners.

They also assist with peer review and with measuring the capabilities of agencies against benchmarks.

The Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies was created by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2015.

Since then, we have seen a clear strengthening of these institutions as a result of the collaboration this network has encouraged and facilitated.

Annual meetings of the association have been opportunities to conduct training and gain from peer-to-peer learning, and to select countries for benchmarking.

An example of this was the Office of the Contractor General of Jamaica offering capacity-building support to the Grenada Integrity Commission on procurement procedures, monitoring and investigation of government contracts.

Another was Grenada providing training centre facilities for the Commonwealth to deliver key capacity-building programmes for institutions in the region.

Our Commonwealth anti-corruption work programme demonstrates our collective determination to eradicate this scourge, and it has achieved a global recognition, notably as recipient of the 2018 International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award.

There have been many other glowing testimonies from heads of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Agencies:

- The Prime Minister of Grenada, The Right Honourable Keith Mitchell, generously said:

“I thank the Commonwealth for the technical assistance it has given to Grenada in particular and the Commonwealth Caribbean in general and look forward to the promotion of Grenada as centre of excellence in anti-corruption work in the Caribbean.”

- The Grenada Minister of Communications, Works, Physical Development, Public Utilities, ICT & Community Development, the Honourable Gregory Bowen, concurs saying:

“The Commonwealth must be applauded for its anti-corruption efforts under the leadership of Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland. This is the fourth year that Commonwealth has trained stakeholders, from Grenada and regional participants.”

- The Chair of the Grenada Integrity Commission, Lady Trotman-Joseph, wrote:

“The Integrity Commission of Grenada would like to express our appreciation for the services Grenada has received from Commonwealth Secretariat through Dr Roger Koranteng.

“It was as a result of his inputs and guidance under the auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat that the Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies (CCAICACB) held its inaugural Conference in Grenada, in 2015.

“The Commonwealth Secretariat has provided the Integrity Commission in Grenada with invaluable support and through his professional skills and competencies and capacity building programmes. Grenada's Integrity Commission has begun to see the benefits of effecting synergies between all our anti-corruption agencies in Grenada and the development of a National Anti-Corruption Strategic Plan.”

- The Chair of the Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies, Mr Dirk Harrison, writes in similar vein:

“Permit me to recognize and acknowledge the exemplary facilitation, financial support and expert advice in the subject areas of public sector governance and international Anti-Corruption afforded to the association by the Commonwealth Secretariat through the sterling leadership of Dr. Roger Koranteng, each year our association has grown in strength and purpose.

“His stewardship has been and continues to be the source of strength for the Association members and we are honour bound and owing gratitude to say

Thank You to Commonwealth secretariat, we could not have done it had it not been for his hard work and effort.”

- The Chair of the Trinidad and Tobago Integrity Commission, Justice Melville Baird, stated:

“The Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies is deeply indebted to the Commonwealth Secretariat for its unstinting assistance and for the gift of Dr Koranteng.

“The CCAICAB is still in its nascent stage and the waters through which our ship must sail in its battle against corruption are fundamentally uncharted. The Commonwealth secretariat through Dr Koranteng has been an invaluable pilot, guiding, advising, encouraging.”

- The Secretary of the Saint Lucia Integrity Commission, Ms Jean Morille, wrote:

“The Office of Integrity Commission of Saint Lucia wishes to voice its appreciation and gratitude to the Commonwealth Secretariat for the excellent work of Dr Roger Koranteng in assisting Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies in the Commonwealth in combating corruption.

“His advice and assistance of to our nation and its citizens are immeasurable and of great necessity.”

Those warm encomiums of praise mean a great deal to us, and they encourage us to work even harder to support all that you are doing both at regional level and in your various national settings to deliver change for the people and communities you serve.

In 2016, very soon after I took up the responsibilities of Secretary-General, which had been entrusted to me by Heads of Government, I convened the Commonwealth *Tackling Corruption Together* conference.

It drew attention, in particular, to the need for a simple pan-Commonwealth tool to provide practical guidance on clear steps that can be taken to promote integrity and combat corruption - within government, and in private sector organisations.

So, I am delighted to report that we at the Commonwealth Secretariat have responded to that need.

Through a consultative process with member countries we have developed Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks.

Indeed, we continue to rely on your expertise as the process of development and refinement continues.

Last month, the Commonwealth Secretariat convened a meeting of experts to review the benchmarks package, and I know that some of you participated and contributed at that gathering.

The package consists of a set of 22 benchmarks, covering topics from sanctions for corruption offences to investigating and prosecuting authorities, and from political lobbying to disclosure of asset ownership.

Each benchmark is defined by a principle stated at a high level, and contains detailed guidance for meeting the level of achievement set by the principle.

The principles and guidance are consistent with international standards, and go further in covering other areas of concern not previously addressed.

Indeed, this Commonwealth package is the first document of which we are aware that connects all the areas of public and private conduct covered by our 22 benchmarks.

Although designed to be achieved nationally, compliance with some benchmarks can also be demonstrated by private sector organisations - for example that on 'Organisational Anti-Corruption Systems'.

This will provide enterprises desiring to engage in procurement processes and pan-Commonwealth trade with a recognised standard of attainment and compliance.

Our intention would be for the benchmarks to be considered by Commonwealth Heads of Government when they meet next year in Rwanda.

We will by that time be one third of the way through the implementation period for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As we move on towards the halfway mark in that period, there is an urgent need for all governments to put in place effective execution, monitoring and evaluation structures for SDG implementation.

The Commonwealth SDG Implementation Toolkit supports countries with policy gap analysis, and with integrating SDG planning into national development agendas, and tracking and monitoring results.

By impairing the ability of governments to collect tax fairly and efficiently, corruption diverts resources away from the vitally important investments that need to be made in areas such as health, education, and renewable energy.

It tends to attract financing towards wasteful projects with only short-term payoffs or negative impact.

Corruption also acts as a tax on investment - or can block it altogether because of uncertainty about demands for future bribes.

Young people are deterred from investing in skills and education - because, where there is corruption, getting ahead depends on who you know, not what you know.

Most damaging of all, corruption hurts the poor - keeping them poor, robbing them of their life chances and ruining their lives.

It hinders economic opportunity and social mobility, undermines trust in institutions, and causes social cohesion to unravel.

All of these negative impacts are especially debilitating for youth.

When corruption is deeply embedded, far too many young people find that they have no prospects, no sense of purpose, no ability to participate, to make their mark, to flourish, or to contribute to society.

They lose the motivation, become disillusioned, disengaged, and disenchanting.

They lose hope - because corruption can be soul-destroying.

But it does not have to be like that - and I am optimistic that Commonwealth Caribbean is turning the tide against corruption.

And the good news continues - with the further progress you are making through the work of your Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies.

According to the 2017 Corruption Perception Index, Commonwealth countries are perceived as less corrupt than non-Commonwealth countries.

The edge Commonwealth countries have over non-Commonwealth countries on corruption perception is corroborated by the World Bank Control of Corruption data from 2012 to 2017.

In the Caribbean region, Commonwealth countries are also perceived as less corrupt than non-Commonwealth countries, with respective CPI scores for those groupings in 2017 being 53 and 32.

World Bank Control of Corruption data confirms this finding, with 2016 scores of 0.43 for Caribbean Commonwealth countries against 0.32 for Caribbean non-Commonwealth countries.

It is encouraging too that according to the Transparency International listing of the ten most corrupt countries in the world, there are no Commonwealth Caribbean countries.

A contributory factor to this is Commonwealth leadership and cooperation which brings to our members wherever they are the benefits of collaborative working and collective action - with counterparts set in every continent and ocean.

Small states such as many in this region face unique development challenges, and are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks, such as natural disasters and climate change.

With limited economic opportunities and significant migration, they often face capacity constraints.

We assist our small states with access to sustainable financing, and help them to build their resilience, and to make their voices heard on the global stage.

Indeed, at this time when multilateralism is under threat, and we see nationalism and narrow self-interest on the rise, the Commonwealth shines as a beacon of hope and promise.

Collaboration, based on the needs and perspectives of all members of our diverse family of nations, is central to our Commonwealth approach.

We draw together countries at almost every stage of social, economic and political development, including some of the smallest and poorest and some of the largest and richest, including five G20 members.

Uniting in a spirit of goodwill and mutual support, the similarities of our systems and institutions enable lessons learnt in one setting to be shared, adapted and applied elsewhere, so that the benefits of progress can be enjoyed more swiftly by others and for the good of all.

So where some of our members may lead on holistic interventions that reduce negative human impacts on the environment and regenerate our common earth, others may show the way on measures to advance social inclusiveness or gender equality, or pioneer pathways towards greater political or economic development.

By sharing knowledge of what has worked, and understanding better what has not, any one may encourage others to move in positive directions.

By offering practical guidance and support, all can help hasten beneficial change.

In response to the expectations of our citizens, we continually raise the standards we set for ourselves - whether through mutual support and encouragement among the anti-corruption agencies of our member nations, or by working together to develop Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks

An understanding of how as countries, as communities and as individuals we are interdependent lies at the heart of all that the Commonwealth brings to our world - and that includes the work of this 5th Commonwealth Caribbean Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies Conference.

So let us work together with renewed vigour, in hope and harmony, to bring health and wholeness to our Commonwealth.