

International Anti-Corruption Day on the 9th December 2015

The event we have come together for today – the international anti-corruption day – this event is of a strange nature. What do we need it for? Why don't we have similar days for other crimes? Has anyone ever thought of organizing an international anti-theft day? No? Why not? Isn't murder even worse than corruption? Why not have an international anti-murder day?

The explanation is simple. Everybody knows that theft and murder are crimes, and everybody, including the culprit, has a sense for the culpability of these crimes. Strangely enough, this does not seem to be the case for corruption. For all too many people, corruption seems to be less of a crime than something like a bad habit. Yes, one should not do it, like one should not smoke or should spend more time on exercises, but it does not evoke the same sense of culpability as an ordinary theft.

Think of people indulged in corruption: a father paying for a better grade of his son in school; a traffic offender paying the police man to turn a blind eye on his offence; a business man paying the civil servant for being granted a contract; a candidate for parliament paying the voter and later being

paid himself for his vote in parliament: could you imagine them pickpocketing somebody? No, they leave this to others, “real” criminals, thinking of their offences as maybe being a bit shady, but not really as crimes. Why is this so?

This is because they are not prepared to identify the victim. Who is the victim if the son gets a better than deserved grade in school? At the end, it is some other student who actually deserves the place in university which will be taken by that son. Who is the victim of the traffic offender if he has gone too fast or passed a red light? If he – and so many others – gets away with it they will go even faster next time with the effect that the death roll on roads increases. Who is the victim of the business man and the corrupt civil servant? It is the competing contractor with the better offer. Who is the victim of the corrupt politician? It is his honest electorate expecting him to represent their interests and not the interests of those lobbyists whose bribes - and whose voting instructions in parliament - he has to accept in order to pay back the money by which he bribed his dishonest voters. So there are always individual victims of corruption even if it is not possible to identify them straight away. The culprits however – those who bribe and those who accept bribes – they like to look away and pretend there are no victims. They are wrong. They are no better than thieves, they steal just like them.

They are even worse because in each and every case of corruption there is yet another victim which is the general public. The general public who will get less qualified university graduates; who will be confronted with insecure roads; who will get more expensive contracts and lower quality for their public buildings, roads and whatever; and who will get incompetent politicians providing only bad governance. A society embarking on that way suffers from cancer because more and more people will think that they can only survive if they participate in this system, and the bad apples will infect the good ones in society.

So I ask you: who is worse, the thief or the corrupt? This is no plea for theft but still you have to admit that corruption has a much more devastating effect on society. And yet it is much more common, tolerated and even accepted in society than theft. It is because many more people are tempted to participate, because many more close their eyes and ignore the consequences for their society, and because it is more difficult to persecute it. So now we know why we need an international anti-corruption day: to raise the nature of this serious crime of corruption to everyone's conscience.

So, where do we stand in Uganda confronting corruption? There is some light, but there is a lot of shadow.

Achievements and efforts of the accountability institutions in Uganda such as the Office of the Auditor General, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority and the Inspectorate General of Government pursue a difficult and ardent fight against corruption and deserve respect and appreciation: more cases were investigated, more audit reports submitted and more cases prosecuted than before. They need our support, all the more if you look at corruption becoming more and more sophisticated in a transforming and evolving society.

Over the years, Uganda has been ranked as increasingly corrupt at both the regional and international ranking in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index: number 142 out of 174 in 2014. During the period from 2010 to 2014, negative perceptions on corruption increased from 48% in 2010 to 82% in 2014. This period registered numerous scandals that involved embezzlement of public resources by government officials. There have been allegations of embezzlement of funds amounting to billions of Uganda shillings earmarked for various government projects such as issuance of identity cards, a pension scheme and bicycles for local councils among others. The limited action from government to investigate, persecute and recover the stolen money has largely contributed to increasing people's negative perception towards government commitment to

fight corruption. Unlike in other East African Countries, where – according to a regional analysis – citizens feel the need to pay a bribe in order to speed up a government service, the reason for Ugandans to pay bribes is that they feel it is the only way to have access to services in the first place. The consequences of corrupt and weak governance touch on all human rights – especially for the poor. They are the ones most in need of public services and they are the most affected, when these services only come at a price. According to the same regional study, Uganda – next to Kenya - had the least percentage of citizens that reported the bribery incidents they encountered to relevant authorities, only 8%. Reasons for not reporting in Uganda were the belief that no action would be taken and that it is viewed as a normal practice in society. This indicates the need for change in law enforcement and in public attitude.

Against this backdrop, we need to strengthen our collective efforts to achieve a positive change:

We need to encourage Accountability Institutions to be alert to upholding the highest level of integrity and being exemplary organizations in applying “zero tolerance to corruption” policies. They should engage in an open relationship with Civil Society Organizations, they should partner with them and use them to reach out to citizens and,

similarly, encourage citizen engagement. Use the media to connect with citizens and thus increase the demand for accountability. Uganda's people have the right to report corruption and should not fear to report a case.

Furthermore I wish to encourage Parliamentarians. It is the role and responsibility of Parliament to actively discuss and adopt the OAG and other report recommendations and encourage and support the Government to drive change. Parliament must enhance efforts and accelerate discussion and enact necessary legislation. Finally let us not forget that the Parliament has “the power of the purse”: anti-corruption institutions need to have adequate resources to fight corruption.

Talking about encouragement, the Judiciary should not be forgotten: All the cases submitted to the Ugandan courts need to be dealt with according to the law, and people should understand the consequences of dishonest and fraudulent activity - punishment by fining and / or imprisonment. The judiciary needs to expedite processes, and the judiciary needs to be assisted to clear the case backlogs.

Finally, the government entities and the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development play a decisive role: They need to win the hearts and minds in creating positive change because you cannot win the fight against corruption if you rely entirely on the work of the law enforcement

agencies. Government entities and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development will have to take up the challenge to increase transparency, implement recommendations, embed internal controls in the systems and create a culture of official and staff responsibility and understanding.

Let me assure you that Germany will stand on the side of Uganda in the endeavor to implement her Accountability Sector Strategic Investment Plan (2014-2019) and her National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2014-2019. Our program “Promotion of Accountability and Transparency in Uganda”, implemented by GIZ and coordinated with efforts of other development partners such as Danida and DFID, supports Uganda’s accountability institutions: the Office of the Auditor General, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority and the Inspectorate General of Government. I thank our Ugandan partners, and I thank GIZ for their sustained dialogue, for creating synergies and for their collective endeavors to tackle transparency issues in Uganda.

Thank you for your attention.