

Media release

Review Mechanism for UN Anti-corruption Convention fails to meet expectations

14 November 2009, Dhaka, After a week of intense negotiations in Doha, Qatar, the States have agreed to a review mechanism to monitor implementation of the of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Under the new mechanism, the States will be monitored every five years to review their performance against obligations to the UNCAC. Findings, based on self-assessments and peer reviews by experts, will be compiled in country review reports. The executive summary of these reports will be made public.

The UNCAC is the only international convention that includes a comprehensive package of institutional, legal and policy measures to tackle corrupt practices, including bribery, embezzlement and money laundering. It obliges 142 States Parties to prevent and criminalize corruption, promote international cooperation to recover stolen assets, provide technical assistance and information exchange. A strong review mechanism is indispensable to ensure compliance of commitments made by the states.

A multi-party official delegation of Bangladesh to the Conference, headed by the Law Minister, Barrister Shafique Ahmed, was among most of the participating countries who were in favour of a transparent, inclusive and effective mechanism.

The Conference, however, failed to provide the adopted mechanism the strength it needs to be effective in tackling the devastating effects of corruption.

Representatives of the UNCAC Civil Society Coalition of over 350 non-governmental organizations from all over the world who attended the conference were particularly disappointed that the agreed mechanism does not contain adequate measures to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and effectiveness called for by most of the participating States.

“Under pressure from a handful of countries, the conference ended without an effective review mechanism, which could have ensured that governments fulfill their obligations”, said Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). The mechanism has specifically failed to meet the demand for full publication of country reports, meaningful participation of civil society organizations, and in-country review visits, he said.

The blocking countries stood against the much-needed provisions of disclosure and inclusiveness which surprised many participants in the conference. “Unwillingness to publish full reports and to engage civil society in the review process reflected the failure of the blocking governments to take their own people into trust”, said Dr. Zaman.

The review mechanism has only made non-mandatory provisions for governments to receive input from civil society, instead of ensuring that these inputs are given to independent reviewers. Even other UNCAC members will not have access to the full findings of the review teams.

A weak review mechanism will mean that it will continue to be hard to bring to account the high and mighty who abuse power and engage in corruption. Criminalization of corruption, which is among its main goals will remain far-fetched.

However, the Bangladesh Government, which has come to power with a huge public mandate to fight corruption, and has followed up by adopting the Right to Information Act, will have nothing to hide, and allow publication of reports in due course, Dr Zaman expected. He called upon the Government to engage with all stakeholders, particularly citizens at large in all efforts to translate into reality the commitments made under the Convention which are also fully consistent with the government's election pledges.

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