

The critical role of international expertise and training programmes in the fight against corruption

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Allow me to begin by expressing my gratitude to the organizers of the 8th ICAC symposium both for the excellent event but also for the invitation to participate as a speaker. As you may know, the word symposium derives from the Greek word *symposio*, which stands for the gathering of people, in a joyful mood, intending to discuss the most substantial matters of their time, far and beyond the worries of their daily lives.

I cannot imagine a more appropriate way to celebrate the 50 years anniversary of the Independent Commission Against Corruption of Hong Kong, than to provide a global platform, for state authorities and civil organizations, to come together, and discuss the current challenges and the way forward in the global anticorruption front.

In the next few minutes, I will try to address challenges related to public integrity issues arising from globalization and rapid technological advancement, with special focus to the significance of peer to peer learning as a key component of any national anti-corruption policy. Additionally, I will briefly refer on how Greece and we in the National transparency Authority incorporate these issues into our approach.

There is no doubt that corruption is an international phenomenon, transcending national borders, and posing significant challenges to public institutions, economic development, and security. According to the UN and the World Bank, corruption costs the global economy around two trillion dollars every year, depriving these resources from those who need them the most.

One of the key drivers of the internationalization of corruption is the globalization and interdependence of our economies. The liberalization of trade and investments facilitates the flow of goods and capital across borders. These conditions, provide the breeding ground for the emergence of sophisticated transnational criminal networks and organized crime syndicates. These groups, operate across multiple jurisdictions, leveraging their networks, resources, and influence, to engage in a wide range of illicit activities.

On a parallel development, and in tandem with technological advancements, the widespread adoption of digital platforms, cryptocurrencies, and encrypted communication channels provides corrupt individuals with unprecedented means to hide their illicit activities. This proliferation has facilitated a surge in cyber-enabled financial crimes. These include hacking, identity theft, and online fraud. Such crimes present high barriers for law enforcement agencies and regulatory bodies. The rapid evolution of technology is truly empowering criminals to exploit innovative tools with alarming agility. Given the above, combating corruption in the digital age has become a very complex task indeed.

At the same time, technology-driven tools such as artificial intelligence, and big data offer novel solutions to these challenges. They enhance transparency, automate processes, and provide real-time insights into financial transactions and public sector databases. Additionally, the establishment of global and regional fora and networks create a shared interest in combatting corruption. Enhanced connectivity through digital platforms and communication networks, facilitates the rapid dissemination of information, exposing corrupt practices and holding perpetrators accountable.

In this context, more than ever before, anti-corruption authorities recognize the benefits of international cooperation and peer-to-peer anti-corruption training because:

- 1. Provide a platform to exchange knowledge and best practice.**

By sharing insights on successful strategies and measures, participants gain valuable perspectives on diverse approaches to tackling corruption. They learn about challenges faced and lessons learned. This exchange enriches our understanding of emerging corruption schemes. It also enhances our ability to develop innovative interventions to deal with them. Of course, there is no one size fits all solution, and we should tailor international best practice to the national context, in order to maximize impact and effectiveness.

- 2. Enable Peer to Peer learning.**

Familiarization with different legal frameworks, institutional structures, and cultural contexts allows us to adapt and tailor our approach. By drawing on diverse experiences, authorities can better identify gaps in their anticorruption efforts. They can then implement more effective measures to address these gaps. Also, we have to keep in mind that, although there is differentiation between various national systems, all of us in the anti-corruption community face common challenges. We don't have to reinvent the wheel to overcome them. We have to exploit and make the best use of the solutions that are already in place and work in the field by our counterparts.

- 3. Promote synergies and inter-agency coordination.**

The establishment of professional networks of support is paramount in strengthening institutional cooperation and fostering effective responses to transnational corruption. These networks facilitate information sharing, enhance mutual assistance, and streamline investigative and prosecutorial efforts across jurisdictions. In our increasingly interconnected world, networks play a pivotal role in forming coordinated responses from the anti-corruption community. By fostering collaboration among government agencies, law enforcement bodies, Civil Society Organisations, and International Government Organisations, these networks create synergies and contribute to building a more resilient anti-corruption community.

- 4. Efficiency of resources.**

Last but not least, knowledge exchange is vital to empower anti-corruption authorities which often operate in resource-constrained environments through access to specialized knowledge, skills, and technical assistance. This support promotes the capacity of our counterparts to detect, prevent, and raise awareness about corruption. Such support is indispensable for leveling the playing field. It ensures that all authorities have the necessary tools and resources to mount effective anti-corruption efforts. By fostering a culture of mutual learning and cooperation, collaborative knowledge exchanges enhance the effectiveness of individual anti-corruption initiatives.

In this framework, the establishment of the Hong Kong International Academy Against Corruption earlier this year marks a milestone towards our common goal. It aims to offer systematic and professional training for graft fighters worldwide. ICAC's 50 years of anti-corruption work and its well-established relations with international organizations ensure that the Academy will bring significant added value to the benefit of the global anti-corruption community.

Facilitating collaboration, sharing best practices, and building support networks through peer to peer training is critical for combating corruption at both the national and international level.

In NTA we design and follow a twofold approach. On the one hand, we put focus on continuous professional development of our auditors and our policy experts by actively seeking training opportunities. On the other hand, we engage in capacity-building initiatives and provide technical expertise to support our counterparts upon request.

This dual strategy underscores our dedication to promote institutional resilience, foster collaborative partnerships, strengthen the broader anti-corruption landscape and, ultimately, advance integrity and transparency globally.

In this context, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the Commissioner Woo and the Deputy Commissioner Yau for their efforts regarding the forthcoming capacity-building program in Athens in July this year. We look forward to exchanging with ICAC colleagues on corruption prevention and forensic investigation techniques. Their insights and expertise will contribute to the upskilling of our operational capacity and further strengthen our collective efforts in promoting integrity and transparency through sharing best practice and lessons learnt in the field.

NTA investigators benefit from international training programmes, organized on different instances by the International Association of Anticorruption Authorities, and the International Association of Computer Investigative Specialists. The Greek graft fighters, were certified on the investigation and prevention of fraud.

On the second axis of our approach, NTA offers Technical Assistance for the enhancement of the operational capacity of the Montenegrin anti-fraud coordination service implementing a series of actions such as:

- Training seminars for the experts of the anti-fraud coordination service, in the fields of irregularities management and use of digital tools.
- The ex-post evaluation of the National Anti-Fraud Strategy for the period 2019-2022, and provide recommendations, on the design of the next strategic framework, for the period 2024-2027.

Furthermore, in 2022, NTA held the Presidency of the Network of Corruption Prevention Authorities of thirty nine participating authorities of the Council of Europe. In that capacity, we led the collective efforts of the network to organize four international webinars on lobbying, whistleblowing, corruption in sports and public procurement. Additionally, we published three guides on anticorruption Strategies, the gender dimension of corruption and management of conflict of interest.

More recently, we hosted a three-day study visit for the National Anticorruption Authority of Nepal in the framework of a World Bank Program. During the programme, auditors presented the methodologies and tools developed by NTA, that have demonstrated their efficacy in enhancing their auditing operations.

At NTA, we are aware, that addressing *Contemporary Challenges in Fighting Corruption*, requires continuous and coordinated action. International cooperation, is truly a critical building block in our approach.

To this direction, we maintain active presence, in international, European, and regional fora. NTA is member to multiple networks, such as the GLOBE Network of UNDOC, the Network of Corruption Prevention Authorities (NCPA) of the Council of Europe, the EU Network Against Corruption and to specialized fora such as the European Lobbying Registrars Network and the Network of European Integrity and Whistleblowing Authorities.

Moreover, we participate to the work of International Organizations such as the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime and the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation with special focus on the Anti-Bribery Convention and we steadily contribute to the implementation of their recommendations for the enhancement of the national anticorruption framework.

In this context, I would like to assure you, that we remain open, to collaboration, and eager to contribute our expertise, to support the design of anticorruption strategies as well as tools, and methodologies, promoting public integrity. Please feel free, to reach out to discuss, potential partnerships, or opportunities for cooperation.

Closing my speech, I urge all of you, esteemed colleagues, to actively explore the prospects, of organizing or participating in peer-to-peer training programmes. These initiatives, offer a perfect way to exchange expertise, and experiences as well as, to connect and forge, in the spirit of camaraderie, a global anti-corruption alliance dedicated to creating a prosperous world of fairness and justice.

Thank you once again for this excellent opportunity to exchange views with colleagues and friends from around the globe!