

UNGASS side event – co-organised by UNDESA and GRECO
“Building transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions”

I would like first of all to thank all the distinguished speakers for their highly interesting contributions to this side event, organised in an excellent partnership between the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDESA, and the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption, GRECO.

Thank you also to all the participants who are with us. We are very encouraged by the level of interest in today’s theme!

It is clear from what we have heard that corruption remains one of the biggest challenges facing countries today. We were all touched by the analysis of Ms Moubayed Siddat about corruption as a factor in the port explosion in Lebanon and the lessons to be learned from that. Corruption undermines the institutions and values of democracy, and it jeopardizes sustainable development, human rights and the rule of law.

The cornerstone for preventing corruption is a high degree of integrity, transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability in conducting public affairs. This is a matter of rules, but it is also very much one of ethics and mentalities.

That is even more true at a time of crisis, such as the one we are experiencing now with the Covid pandemic. In a context like that, anti-corruption standards should not be relaxed or compromised on. On the contrary in fact, we should be looking at proactive and innovative solutions, and we have to take on board the lessons learned far.

This requires some careful reflection about which anti-corruption measures work, which ones have not produced the results we expected, and which ones are looking promising. It also requires education and training if we want to instil and sustain the right attitudes, for instance on governance, as Ms Haataja explained so clearly, including in the excellent UNDESA video.

The interventions today highlighted several initiatives and good practices to strengthen integrity in the public sector.

For example, the role of oversight institutions, including in relation to the pandemic, is likely to prove crucial for the proper management of public affairs and public resources. The observations that Ms Valli shared with us of the Italian experience is one that may help others. We also note the critical role played by supreme audit institutions in the anti-corruption framework, and their part in monitoring implementation of the SDGs, as outlined by Ms Guillan.

International bodies also play a decisive role in pushing forward sustained anticorruption reforms, at regional and global level. Here, the workshop has given us some concrete examples, such as due compliance with international standards as highlighted by the President of GRECO, Mr Mrcela, the development of international cooperation networks, the granting of excellence awards in recognition of specific and real achievements such as the one presented by Mr Rahman, or the issuing of anti-corruption and ethics tools and guidance, among others.

I would like us to leave on an optimistic note, and with what I hope is a strong motivation to keep working to fight and prevent corruption.

This is an area where we need the full commitment of all States and actors to reinforce the capacities of governments and public servants. Under-Secretary General Zhenmin put it very well in his opening remarks – we have to all stand together.