

“Political patronage and its impact on corruption in the Arab Region”

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“Corrupt-free South East Asia: Common Goal Common Action”

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. First I would like to thank the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia for hosting this important event and the South East Asian Parliamentarians against Corruption for their work. I am delighted to be here and to be given this opportunity to speak to you about Political Patronage and its impact on corruption in the Arab Region.

As most of you may know Political Patronage is the common practice in political systems to award positions of power or bestow special favors to certain individuals and businesses that have previously helped the leader to attain the position. In fact political patronage is a key challenge to the fight against corruption in the MENA Region. Revolutions sweeping across the region during 2011 have shed light on widespread corruption, particularly political corruption. The former has also uncovered widespread evidence of political patronage, nepotism and collusion between the public and private sectors which inadvertently contributed to the heightened levels of civil unrests and public protests.

Compared to global averages, the key anti- corruption indexes show corruption levels to be very high in many countries across the MENA region. Although most Arab countries have specific characteristics (political, social and economic) that create particular challenges for overcoming corruption, there are several common challenges posed by corruption that apply to most of the Arab countries, particularly Political Patronage that is so rife in these countries and widely accepted as a “fact of life”. Today, political patronage is evident at both the bottom and top ends of public administration area. At states bottom, each party has tried while in office to allow in the largest number of individuals possible. At state’s top level, almost all appointments in both the ministerial and the extra ministerial domains are political. Patronage is also clearly evident at the middle level of public administration and includes the selective

promotion of public employees within the civil service, as well as preferential transfers to privileged in-state positions.

Thus political patronage is not considered uncommon in the MENA region for gaining an employment or an office. Positions within the state bureaucracy are usually awarded due to kinship or personal relationships regardless of personal qualifications. In most of the Arab countries the selection process of public officials is constrained to a large extent by unclear rules. Moreover, public administration does not have any procedures in place for the identification and management of conflict of interest situations in government, post public employment or in public procurement ; consequently, the lack of these procedures encourages political patronage, nepotism and favouritism. The awarding of public procurement contracts lacks transparency and usually the allocation of work contracts depends more on collusion between private companies and public officials rather than on competitive bidding processes.

Large scale patronage, besides causing a large and ineffective state, is also responsible for widespread and costly corruption in the MENA Region, in addition to loss of citizen trust in government and state agencies. This reality has led as well to the undermined accountability of broader society and compromised the credibility and effectiveness of public institutions. Furthermore, it contributed to the inflation of civil service either through the hiring of large numbers of state employees or through the creation of new state institutions and agencies in order to absorb the surplus labor force.

In recent years, several anti-corruption reform efforts have been undertaken by many of Arab countries. These have mainly been directed at legal and institutional reforms including ratification of the UNCAC “United Nations Convention against Corruption” the most comprehensive international convention relating to corruption, drafting important pieces of national anti corruption legislation and establishing specific oversight institutions such as anti corruption agencies and commissions. On another level a number of Arab Countries swept by the Arab Spring (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya) showed promising opportunities for political reform and the restructuring of legal and institutional frameworks to enhance public integrity. These countries have all experienced the change of Head of Regimes but its unlikely that change in leadership only can bring real change if its not accompanied by a systemic reforms that address the root causes of corruption residing in the whole regime and not only in the Head of regime. In Egypt for example we are witnessing a “counter- revolution” against the revolution and many analysts are saying that what is happening in Egypt is a sign of a return to the old regime, therefore reform efforts have resulted in varying levels of success in these countries.

Despite all the efforts made international organizations considered that the implementation of laws is still very weak, this fact indicates that a greater political will is needed to establish and uphold effective enforcement mechanisms and a better engagement of all political actors including civil society organisations is required.



Parliamentarians as representatives of the people must be entrusted with the oversight responsibility of screening more of the presidential appointees, monitoring the implementation of the legislations on public appointments and reviewing public procurement acts, this could help in reducing corruption in public sector appointments and procurement, respectively.