

Remarks before the Task Force Conference

September 17th, 2009

Washington, DC

By François Valerian

Thank you, Tom. Thank you, Raymond, for your drive in forming this task force, thank you to our Norwegian supporters and to the other governments here represented.

I am proud to be the head of private sector programmes with Transparency International, a global movement created in 1993 by a handful of individuals, - one of them, Frank Vogl, is here with us today -, a handful of individuals who wanted to fight for the very people whose sufferings have been reminded to us by those awful images this morning.

You have at least two types of moderators on a legal and very technical topic such as ours this afternoon. You have the ones who are well-known experts of the topic and present all the conclusions in their opening remarks, and you have those whose knowledge of the topic is a more general one and try to be good at watching the clock.

Today I will clearly belong to the second category, but the layman that I am would like to use the short time allowed to him in order to share with you a few comments on this panel's topic as it relates to other topics covered in our conference.

Here is the description of our action item: "Require that predicate offenses for a money laundering charge are harmonized at the most restrictive level and codified". I have a first comment here, which is that the fight against money laundering is clearly "going after the crooks and the criminals", to borrow the words of Poul Engberg-Pedersen in his brilliant address yesterday morning. It is also going after the corrupt people, to use a word I am glad to have heard several times this morning and is central to the fight of Transparency International. We should never lose sight of this objective. If we need to have all corporations worldwide report in great details on a country-per-country basis in order to stop the crooks, the criminals and the corrupt, that's fine but we will always have to make the case, and it is true of each of the five task force action items.

I have another comment, which is on wording, if a non-native English speaker may comment on English words, but those particular words are Greek or Latin, and as French I feel legitimate to comment. Our action item calls for "harmonization, codification", and the background section of the task force documents complains about those predicate changes not being "universal". The call for universal solutions has been strong in our two days, as it is on many issues our civil society organizations are trying to tackle. It seems particularly important to call for global solutions in global finance, but our call for global solutions is also, to some extent, a call for global governance, if not for a global government which would be able to conceive and implement smart regulation for a global economy.

Such a global government does not exist, and we have to bear that in mind when we try to convert our sophisticated studies into impactful campaigns. What are our messages? Can global governance be distributed across national governments? If we want to strengthen those governments towards potentially corrupt individuals or businesses, we also want to make sure

that we are able to fight corruption within those governments the way Transparency International France is suing the three African heads of state who were mentioned this morning, and exactly the way Nancy Boswell, chair of Transparency International USA, is fighting corporate corruption. What are our messages, then, and which advocacy pressure points do we want to use? What practical and feasible measures are we advocating for? Are we aiming for a US bill or an international convention? And don't we already have an international convention, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), highly detailed on asset recovery, bank secrecy and other matters of interest to us, a convention whose worldwide implementation is the priority objective of a global campaign led by Transparency International. Time has come for concrete advocacy.

That leads me to my final comment. Calls for drastic change were strong among the world leaders last fall when Dow Jones was at 8,000 points. They were vibrant in March below 7,000. Today as we are nearing 10,000, if we except from time to time the US and French presidents, those calls can barely be heard among the world leaders. Let us use our window of opportunity for courageous and realistic proposals; it won't stay open for ever. That being said, I thank you for your patience and hand over to our first speaker...