

**Remarks of Attorney General Eric Holder at the Opening Plenary of the VI Ministerial  
Global Forum on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity**

**Doha, Qatar~ Saturday, November 7, 2009**

Your Highness, Attorney General Al-Marri, Excellencies, Colleagues:

It is a distinct honor for me to join you to inaugurate the Sixth Global Forum on Combating Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity. Let me begin by commending the leadership and hospitality of His Highness, the Emir -- as well as that of His Excellency Dr. Al-Marri and of the Government of Qatar -- in their role as hosts of both the Global Forum and the Third Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

We come here for two reasons: To celebrate what has been accomplished since Global Forum One; and -- more important -- to recommit ourselves to the task that remains -- the task of fighting corruption wherever it manifests itself. We have made progress in this fight -- but we must do more.

As President Obama has said, "The struggle against corruption is one of the great struggles of our time." Corruption is condemned by all religions, all ethical codes, all legal systems. It hinders all development, slows all progress, impedes all advancement -- both within our own countries and across our borders. It strikes hardest at the poor and vulnerable, siphoning scarce resources away from those most in need. It advances the selfish interests of a dishonest few over the interests of the great many who work hard and who obey the law and our common traditions. Corruption erodes trust in government and private institutions alike; it undermines confidence in the fairness of free and open markets; and it breeds contempt for the rule of law. Corruption is, simply put, a scourge on civil society.

And yet corruption continues to flourish. All nations -- all nations -- struggle against corruption -- the United States no less than every other nation represented here. I know this- I began my career as a lawyer who prosecuted American public officials who betrayed the trust of the people they were sworn to serve. And all nations can do more. That is why this gathering is so important. Since Vice President Al Gore opened the first Global Forum ten years ago, this conference has stood as a crucial rallying point in the great international struggle against corruption. From Washington to The Hague, from Seoul to Brasilia, in Johannesburg and, now, in Doha, we have joined together every two years to consider how best to fight corruption.

During these ten years, we have accomplished much. We have joined hands to draft and bring into force the United Nations Convention Against Corruption -- the first truly global anti-corruption treaty. We have seen unprecedented cooperation across international boundaries to tackle corruption. And we have witnessed such important developments as the establishment of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

Yet this is not the time to rest on our laurels. For despite our important achievements, the cancer of corruption remains. Indeed, each and every one of us here should be alarmed by the sobering results of Transparency International's 2009 Global Corruption Barometer, a global public opinion survey of more than 73,000 people in 69 countries. Half of the respondents to that survey viewed the private sector as corrupt – an increase of eight percent from five years ago. More than 60 percent of respondents said that political parties, parliaments, and government civil service were corrupt. And the poor continued to pay more, largely as a result of petty bribery demands. Shockingly, in some regions, four-in-ten respondents reported having had to make bribe payments in the past year. And only three-in-ten respondents to the survey said that their government's efforts to fight corruption were effective. This last statistic should be a clarion call to all of us here today.

So it is with purpose and urgency that we come here -- not simply to acknowledge our achievements, but to chart a way forward that will make our efforts to fight corruption more effective. We must act. Let me suggest three critical steps that I believe we should take together.

First, we must renew our efforts for ratification and full implementation of the UN Convention Against Corruption. Seven years after it opened for signature, several of the world's largest economies – including several of our close partners in the G-20 – still have not ratified the Convention. Still others that have ratified have not fully implemented the Convention. We again call upon all countries to join and implement the Convention.

And all of us who already are parties to the Convention must put in place an effective, transparent, and inclusive review mechanism. That is the critical question that we face this coming week in the Conference of States Parties. We will have failed our Governments and more importantly our peoples if we do not produce a review mechanism that is itself transparent and inclusive, and that allows our experts to have a candid dialogue about each nation's anti-corruption efforts. I urge the delegations to dedicate themselves to achieving this goal.

Second, we must work together to ensure that corrupt officials do not retain the illicit proceeds of their corruption. There is no gentle way to say it: When kleptocrats loot their nations' treasuries, steal natural resources, and embezzle development aid, they condemn their nations' children to starvation and disease. In the face of this manifest injustice, asset recovery is a global imperative.

In response to this ongoing challenge, I stand before you to announce a redoubled commitment on behalf of the United States Department of Justice to recover such funds. Indeed, we have scored successes in this regard already. Through enforcement of our asset forfeiture laws, and in close cooperation with our law enforcement partners in other countries, the United States was able to repatriate more than \$20 million to the nation of Peru that was looted during the government of Alberto Fujimori and Vladimiro Montesinos -- and we have assisted in the repatriation of tens of millions of dollars more. We likewise have forfeited and repatriated more than \$100 million to Italy that constituted proceeds of corruption in the judiciary, and have repatriated several million dollars to the Government of Nicaragua traceable to the illicit conduct of the administration of Arnaldo Aleman.

But we – both the United States and all countries here – need to do more. It is only with a truly international and cooperative response that we will be able to achieve success in recovering the proceeds of corruption. Asset recovery requires the dedication and expertise of investigators and prosecutors in both the country victimized by the corrupt acts and in those countries in which corruption proceeds have been secreted. In that regard, with support from the U.S. Department of State, we will continue and expand our Asset Recovery Mentor Program piloted earlier this year, and – as called for in the Leaders’ Statement at the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh, we will work with the World Bank’s Stolen Assets Recovery Program, and with the Financial Action Task Force. I challenge all of my colleagues here today similarly to commit to concerted action in support of asset recovery.

Third, countries must end official impunity with regard to corruption. In a number of countries, immunity for actions of public officials, judges, and parliamentarians has been broadly adopted, often for the legitimate reason of affording officials protection from politically motivated prosecutions. In too many places, however, public officials are given blanket immunity from investigation and prosecution for any action, even where the conduct involves public corruption. In such places, immunity becomes impunity. This cannot stand.

Let me be clear: Swift and effective prosecution of corrupt public officials must be at the core of our broader effort to end corruption. As I indicated, this mandate is deeply personal to me. More than thirty years ago, fresh out of law school, I started my career as a new prosecutor in the United States Department of Justice, prosecuting public officials and those who bribed them. I know first-hand the challenges of fighting corruption as well as the considerable obstacles to effective enforcement. But I also know the vital importance of these efforts. As law enforcement officials, we can have no more solemn duty than to protect the integrity of our government institutions by vindicating the rights of those harmed by the greed and dishonesty of a corrupt few.

The importance of vigorous prosecution of corrupt public officials is a lesson that we in the United States have learned through hard experience. Indeed, from 2004 through 2008, the Department of Justice has convicted hundreds of public officials in the United States. We have convicted elected officials, appointed officials, military officials, and judges, as well as private citizens who illegally sought unfair advantage by bribing public officials.

Key to these efforts is the dedication of career prosecutors with the independence to prosecute corruption cases objectively and fairly, without regard to political affiliation, status, wealth, or position. Because of these prosecutors’ tireless work, our institutions are stronger, our markets are fairer, and our people are better off.

We must all strive for this, and we must help each other in this vital cause. We must vigorously enforce our own laws that prohibit bribery of foreign officials, such as, in the United States, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. And we must work together to support our partners in anti-corruption enforcement, and expose all efforts to undermine the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives. Together, we can make a difference.

So while this Global Forum series is coming to a conclusion, the work of the Global Forum must not end. Its spirit and its mission must, and will, live on -- in the UN Conference of States Parties, in the International Anticorruption Conference, and in the daily work of the many civic organizations, institutions, and governments present here today.

In this great struggle, we must not falter or compromise. Too many children's lives, too many communities' hopes, too many futures depend upon the fulfillment of our commitment. We must not turn away from what is truly a defining issue of our time. What, my colleagues, will you do? How committed to this effort will you be? Join me in dedicating ourselves to eradicating the plague of corruption from all of our countries. Our people demand, and deserve, nothing less.

Thank you.

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*Source: US Department of Justice*