

15. Closing Address by Vice President Gore

The full text of Vice President Gore's closing remarks to the Global Forum on Fighting Corruption may be found in the Appendix.

Vice President Gore said that Forum participants from ninety countries had traveled more than a million collective miles. They had done this because official corruption imposes a painful cost on the quality of their nations' lives, and because of their belief that if there is cooperation to fight it, the costs of corruption to countries and communities can be reduced.

Presentations at the conference left no doubt that corruption accelerates crime, hurts investment, stalls growth, bleeds national budgets, and undermines faith in freedom. Corruption is an enemy of democracy, because democracy lives on trust and corruption destroys trust. However, the Forum assembled because of its belief that corruption can be fought, and had heard success stories in that fight.

The head of the police force in Colombia began with surveys and background checks in a corrupt department, then fired a large number of corrupt officers. He selected candidates for ethical values for enrollment in a well-paid special force against drug trafficking. Officers in that force regularly report the bribes they have rejected. The chief, recognizing that a new culture cannot be built on one person, created an outside review board of prominent members of society to monitor the honesty and effectiveness of the police.

Over three days, the Forum participants had discussed many of the principles and practices that underlie this and other successes against official corruption. To get honesty from government, it was first necessary to have honest justice and security officials. To have honest police, they must be paid an honest wage. While no fight against corruption can succeed if it requires police to be moral heroes, conscience is also essential to honest public service. No government salary can ever satisfy greed, so candidates for justice and security positions must be selected for their ethical values.

At the same time, the clergy can help anticorruption efforts immensely, if its voice can be heard around the world through interfaith statements on fighting corruption. The clergy are the public's conscience, and their support would strengthen those fighting for more ethical government.

The Forum had also discussed the importance of government reinvention and reform, including fewer, clearer laws, more measurable results, disinterested economic decision-making, strong and independent judiciaries, and strong ethics and financial disclosure rules.

As military forces move toward nontraditional defense roles such as counterdrug efforts and border protection, their vulnerabilities to corruption increase. There is a need to respond decisively with strong, clean leadership, appropriate training and strong emphasis on the principles of military professionalism.

There has been much discussion about the importance of openness and transparency, and the value of information. Many are convinced that a major positive force in the fight against corruption is today's ever-expanding access to information. But information alone is not enough. The core of accountability is the fusion of information and action, on the part of public officials, private citizens, business and non-governmental organizations. The latter are a core component of civil society, and bear a great share in holding governments accountable.

These themes represent international norms for fighting corruption. If leaders are committed to these norms, governments should ratify and implement the international conventions that embody them, such as the OECD and OAS Conventions. He also recognized the fact that earlier that week, ministers from eleven African nations had approved a set of 25 principles on anticorruption, good governance and accountability, and were taking these principles to their governments for consideration.

As governments seek to ratify and implement anticorruption conventions, they should take advantage of known anticorruption principles and effective practices. A set of guiding principles has been distributed at the Global Forum. (The text of these Guiding Principles for Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity Among Justice and Security Officials may be found before part 1 of this Report.) These have been compiled, reviewed, written and edited by a broad cross section of experts, and represent the first major effort to articulate a set of comprehensive global principles for fighting official corruption. He urged that participants take these Principles home, talk about them, test them, see if they can be used. The Vice President said he would present these Principles to President Clinton for discussion by the G8 at the Koln Summit in the summer. He hoped they would make a difference in the efforts of all nations undertaking anticorruption efforts.

In addition to general principles for fighting corruption, participants had heard of several new tools to help countries gather data, identify priorities and apply the principles necessary to fight corruption. The United States will work closely with the World Bank, local organizations, civil society and other international donors and non-governmental organizations to support the use of diagnostic surveys. Countries that adopted this approach had seen the dynamic impact of information. When overwhelming evidence of a problem is presented to the public in an open forum, government inaction is no longer an option.

The past three days had also included enthusiastic discussions about the promise of mutual evaluations. The Vice President was pleased to hear from those eager to pursue an Internet-based reporting device like that he had proposed at the Forum opening, and from those that support offering individual citizens and business persons the opportunity to serve as evaluators.

The Vice President said he was immensely proud of the work of this conference. He was not alone in the view that such a conference could not have happened ten years before. Then, if nations had been able to overcome the implicit self-criticism to convene about corruption, there might have been so much discussion of the source of the problem that there would have been little time to discuss solutions. Very possibly, lines would have divided north from south, east from west, rich from poor. Countries might have fought over who was worse, the bribemaker or the bribetaker. Much has changed in ten years. Good will is almost a physical feature of this meeting. Conversations have been marked by honesty that expresses trust and builds trust.

An hour ago, the Netherlands' chief delegate proposed to follow this event with a second Global Forum, to be held in the Netherlands next year. On behalf of the United States, the Vice President thanked the Netherlands for its initiative and hospitality, and was honored to offer the services of the United States as co-sponsor. The Korean delegation had proposed an annual global ministerial forum on fighting corruption. Heads of delegation accepted this idea, and the Vice President hoped to see it come to fruition.

Finally, the delegate from Kenya had urged that participants agree to a declaration expressing the common sense of urgency about the problem of corruption and their commitment to continue the dialogue begun in this Forum. (The text of that Declaration may be found before part 1 of this Report.)

In the past, upright and moral men had often felt alone in their moral struggle. Today, they must have help as more and more worked to change culture and customs, to turn corrupt into outcasts and expose them as criminals. As corruption is uncovered and the corrupt expelled, the people will sense their own growing power to eject it, and will quicken their efforts to do so. More will see that official corruption is theft from the nation, which means theft from the weakest, the poor, old, disabled, sick, children, newborns. It is for these weakest that participants in this Forum gathered, and pledge their common commitment to honest government.

The Vice President quoted President Abraham Lincoln: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." He asked participants, in departing, to pledge themselves to this cause, for if they do not lead, no one else will, because no one else can. He thanked those present for having attended the Global Forum.

