

15 October 2020

Secretary-General's statement on corruption in the context of COVID-19

Corruption is criminal, immoral and the ultimate betrayal of public trust.

It is even more damaging in times of crisis – as the world is experiencing now with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The response to the virus is creating new opportunities to exploit weak oversight and inadequate transparency, diverting funds away from people in their hour of greatest need.

Governments may act in haste without verifying suppliers or determine fair prices.

Unscrupulous merchants peddle faulty products such as -- defective ventilators, poorly manufactured tests or counterfeit medicines.

And collusion among those who control supply chains has led to outrageous costs of much-needed goods, skewing the market and denying many people life-saving treatment.

We must work together to stop such thievery and exploitation by clamping down on illicit financial flows and tax havens; tackling the vested interests that benefit from secrecy and corruption; and exercising utmost vigilance over how resources are spent nationally.

Together, we must create more robust systems for accountability, transparency and integrity without delay.

We must hold leaders to account.

Businesspeople must act responsibly.

A vibrant civic space and open access to information are essential.

And we must protect the rights and recognize the courage of whistle-blowers who expose wrongdoing.

Technological advances can help increase transparency and better monitor procurement of medical supplies.

Anti-corruption bodies need greater support and empowerment.

The United Nations itself continues to prioritize transparency and accountability, in and beyond the COVID-19 response.

For many people in all regions, corruption has been a long-standing source of distrust and anger against their leaders and governments.

But corruption in the time of COVID-19 has the potential to seriously undermine good governance around the world, and to send us even farther off-track in our work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

I urge all governments and all leaders to be transparent and accountable, and to use the tools provided by the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

As an age-old plague takes on new forms, let us combat it with new heights of resolve.