

2023 World Anti-Corruption Conference (WACC)

“Towards a Corrupt-Free Future: Strengthening Global Governance Together”

Good morning Your Excellencies, esteemed speakers, moderators, Tan Sri-Tan Sri, Dato’ Sri–Dato’ Sri, Datuk–Datuk, distinguished guests, sponsors, delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to the 2023 World Anti-Corruption Conference (WACC). I am happy to see so many here today, I extend a very warm welcome to all our distinguished guests, speakers and moderators to our 2023 WACC.

The International Strategy Institute (ISI) is a not-for-profit organisation which helps connect governments and businesses across Asia and the world. For those who are not familiar, ISI has organised many conferences over the past years. Our conferences have different subject-matters and they are from different areas of interest and sectors.

For our 2023 World Anti-Corruption Conference (WACC) this year, the theme we have is “Towards a Corrupt-Free Future: Strengthening Global Governance Together”. On the topic of Anti-Corruption, ISI has previously also organised similar conferences on this subject-matter. There is a lot of interest in this. Everyone is talking about combating corruption, having plans on how to fight corruption, how to deal with this problem even at the root cause, what are the suggestions, how are the plans being carried out.

What does corruption involve? What is it? Some of the words that we have heard are dishonesty, unscrupulousness, fraudulence and misconduct. When corruption is involved, these are some of the words that we hear of. These are so frequently used.

Kofi A. Annan, the former Secretary-General of The United Nations in his foreword in the “United Nations Convention Against Corruption” said “corruption” is “a plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies”.

What actually is corruption? We hear about corruption all the time. It is not a simple situation which can be handled overnight. Corruption is a complex situation. It involves the social, political and economic situation which affects all countries. If people think that corruption only happens in certain parts of the world, that’s wrong. Corruption is a worldwide problem and this problem needs global solutions.

Why is corruption so serious? Because it undermines democratic institutions and the rule of law. It also dampens economic development and distorts markets. There are global institutions that have put in efforts in combating corruption.

For more than 20 years, the World Bank Group has been working in its client countries to mitigate the destructive effects of corruption. The World Bank helps to establish competencies to develop and implement policies. Besides that, programs and practices are planned to strengthen public integrity and sustain anti-corruption efforts.

Besides the World Bank Group, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are also at the forefront of anti-corruption efforts. They have been involved in the planning and drafting of pragmatic frameworks and comprehensive benchmarks because all these are needed in the process of combating corruption. These are some of the requirements to achieve and reinforce legal and regulatory regimes. These regimes are needed as part of the process and efforts to combat corruption.

The adoption of the “United Nations Convention Against Corruption” was another remarkable achievement. This was complemented by another important implementation - the “United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”.

There are so many damages corruption can cause. Corruption is a big challenge to economic and social development around the world. The United Nations Secretary General made a special initiative and it is known as the UN Global Compact. Under this UN Global Compact, there are more than 18,000 companies and 3,800 non-business signatories based in over 160 countries and 62 Local Networks. This makes the UN Global Compact the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative.

The UN Global Compact is a call to companies to support their company operations and strategies with the Ten Principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. The aim is to raise the collective global impact of business through this Ten Principles and by having responsible companies. The UN Global Compact is the biggest corporate sustainability effort in the whole world. It feels that the negative impacts from corruption are on sustainable development and it also affects poor communities. For companies, corruption slows down your business growth, increases your costs and it brings serious legal and reputational risks. The Tenth Principle says that “Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms.” As such, policies and programmes to

address all forms of corruption must be developed by companies, governments, UN agencies and society so that we can all have a more transparent global economy.

Besides the Tenth Principle, I would also like to mention about the Anti-Corruption Call to Action that was launched in 2014. This is another very important effort. It was an appeal by the private sector to governments to implement anti-corruption measures and policies. This effort shows that the private sector placed importance on having systems of good governance that will be established. These are fundamental pillars of a sustainable and inclusive global economy and these are also important views of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

For the government, there are a few parties they must forge alliances with. The civil society is one, international bodies and organisations, and also the media where responsible reporting is important to help expose corruption and promote messages which talks about anti-corruption to the society. It is not easy to rise above the problems caused by corruption and to tackle it because it is not a new problem. Corruption has plagued societies for a long time, slowing progress and even justice is sacrificed.

Locally for Malaysia, the prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has announced for the country to fight corruption. He has demanded for urgent and quick actions to be taken and has vowed to combat corruption that he describes as a “litmus test” for a government’s integrity. The government must implement wide measures to check on accusations and reports made and to expose offenses. For the government to take action, it is important to instill anti-corruption education and public awareness. Even for the school pupils in school, knowledge in this is not too early. The youth must know about values so that the country can shape individuals who are ethical and are aware of what it is to uphold integrity.

Like what I mentioned just now about civil society, the government cannot fight corruption by itself. It must involve all sectors of the civil society and organisations, alliances must be formed to get international bodies to join in the fight. For Malaysia and for any other countries too, action plans must involve a collective effort, united country and government, transparency and accountability

Corruption is such an important issue for all to work on. Next year in June 2024 the world’s biggest independent global forum in fighting corruption will be hosted at Vilnius, Lithuania – The International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC). From this we can see that such plans and efforts to combat corruption are not only organised by certain organisations or countries, but on a global basis.

For us here at the World Anti-Corruption Conference (WACC), we have planned four sessions : Session 1 will focus on “Law Enforcement on Prevention and Persecution” where our moderators and speakers will look at law enforcement's role in prevention and prosecution which is multifaceted and essential for the well-being of our society. We must recognize their efforts in crime prevention and applaud their commitment to justice in prosecution.

Our second session will talk about “Strengthening Global Governance Mechanisms”. By strengthening global governance mechanisms, we can build a world where justice and integrity prevail. A world where governments are accountable, institutions are transparent, and citizens are empowered to demand their rights.

Our third session will discuss on “Preventing the Misuse of Laws to Evade Accountability”, a grave concern that undermines the fundamental principles of fairness and justice. It is our collective responsibility to address this issue head-on. Accountability is the cornerstone of a just and equitable society. It ensures that those who wield power, whether in the public or private sector, are held responsible for their actions and decisions. It is the safeguard that prevents corruption and abuse of authority. In essence, accountability ensures that no one is above the law.

The fourth session will debate about “Combating Government Corruption: Ensuring Accountability for Clean Governance”. Corruption erodes the trust between the government and its citizens, undermines the rule of law, and diverts valuable resources away from the people who need them most. We cannot build a just and prosperous society without ensuring accountability for clean governance.

With all these that I have mentioned, I am sure there will be interesting discussions that will take place here at our World Anti-Corruption Conference. We are confident that these discussions will contribute to all overall efforts of combating corruption.

I would like to wish all speakers, moderators & guests a productive time. My gratitude goes to all our sponsors, our sincere thanks for your kind support. Your willingness to collaborate with ISI has brought the World Anti-Corruption Conference (WACC) to another level.

Thank you.