

**His Excellency Tim Stew, British High Commissioner
Address at TTTI's Anti-Corruption Conference 2017**

Battling corruption

2.6 trillion US dollars. That's a figure the World Economic Forum estimates corruption costs the global economy each year. If, very simplistically, you were to split that figure by the world population that means the cost to each of us as global citizens each year is about 2,500 TT dollars. Each of us, every man, woman and child. Each year. Every year. Of course this is simplistic. Because those countries where there is less corruption mask the true figures where corruption is more rife.

This issue – the cancer of corruption which affects our societies – is so important and so urgent that I believe there is no time to waste. Corruption damages us all. And we need to get to the heart of the issue, the facts and the figures and the action that needs to follow, as quickly as possible.

I said global citizens deliberately. Because corruption affects us all, wherever we live, whatever our nationality. None of our countries are immune. I stand here not to preach but with humility. In Britain we have suffered our fair share of corruption. Britain, Trinidad, Tobago. We are all islands. But transnational crime and corruption don't see us that way. They respect no borders. But we need to stop corruption crossing geographical borders. I am clear Britain does not for example want corrupt funds in the reputable financial centre which is the City of London, whatever their origin.

Corruption runs counter to our shared human values. It rewards those who don't play by the rules. It creates a system of patronage where resources are shared by a small elite, while the majority are denied the benefits and proceeds of growth which are rightfully theirs.

But tackling corruption isn't just morally right. It's economically right too. Companies complicit in paying bribes find they face higher costs, or - operating in an unpredictable environment – sign contracts which then can't be honoured or completed. Services and people suffer. Companies face legal or reputational damage for being complicit in a corrupt system.

Still more importantly perhaps, over the long term it is the societies which create and enforce transparent stable rules which attract high-value investment. Investors are prepared to risk more of their money in those environments and those markets.

So if it is so damaging why does corruption still happen? I'm a diplomat, an interested observer of life in Trinidad & Tobago, seeking to understand. I've put the question to many here. I've heard a number of answers. "It's just the way of getting business done here." OK but not in other parts of the world. And that doesn't make Trinidad competitive or get the best results for you either. The Anti Bribery Act in Britain passed some years ago means that in such circumstances British companies can't and won't compete, and can't and won't do business here if they see corrupt practice. You miss out on choice, the choice for quality goods and services. Trinidad and Tobago's global reputation suffers. And we each miss out on building closer links.

I've heard it's because of the oil and gas wealth. "Times have been good. So as long as money trickles down and the country's doing well, everyone benefits." I'll be straight. I've

lived in too many countries to believe in trickle down economics. What I've seen that curious phrase mean is usually there is a gush of benefits to a small elite. And no-one else receives anything. Which drives social inequality, social problems, crime. If we believe in trickle down economics, we kid ourselves. Still more so when a country is facing economic challenges, when God is apparently not being a Trini. There's no gush, let alone a trickle. People suffer.

I've heard too that attempts to tackle the cancer of corruption have faltered in the face of accusations that such attempts are "driven by politics or ethnicity". I hear it. I don't buy it. I know, after 2 years here, this place has lively politics. But it comes down to a simple principle. If you do wrong you should be held to account. Your politics or your ethnicity are neither a cause of corruption, nor a defence against it. If you've done wrong, you face the music. Whatever your position, whatever your politics, whatever your beliefs. I've seen enough scandals and defensive moves in Britain to know this is the only path.

So what is the answer?

I don't claim to have it. But I see the need for an integrated comprehensive approach. And wider experience suggests three elements we need to pursue together to get results and see change.

First, Governments have a significant role to play in tackling corruption by passing legislation and introducing measures for its enforcement. I've already mentioned the Bribery Act in Britain. It had significant impact. It means that any British company engaging in corrupt practice anywhere in the world is subject to prosecution in Britain. I ask a handful of questions. What honest objection could there be to new procurement legislation in this country which seeks to hold officials to account and ensure they drive for value for money and accountability to the public of this country? What honest objection could there be to the introduction of whistleblower legislation, as long as it provides reasonable protection both to those who seek to speak out against corrupt practice, and those against whom unfounded accusations might be made? What honest objection could there be to resisting the introduction of Unexplained Wealth Orders, which simply require people to show how that wealth has been acquired? If you have nothing to hide, I see no honest reason to object.

Second there need to be in place measures to reduce the opportunity for corruption to take place, measures to tackle the enablers of corruption, through strong institutions and regulation. I've been around the world enough to see where the strength of our democracies lies. It's not in free and fair elections, though those are important. Instead I'd argue that our democracies depend on the strength of our institutions. Things will go wrong. As people we are prone to make mistakes. To be drawn to the easy win. We're all human. But it's how our institutions respond to this. To hold people to account, to investigate, to provide clarity. Those are the things that assure our democracies.

The third element I see is the need for grass-roots empowerment for citizens. I mentioned earlier how corruption has been explained away to me. As I said I don't yet I buy any of the reasons. I still don't understand why people here put up with corruption as a part of daily life. Where is the outrage? Where is the shame that should be felt by those caught abusing the system?

We should all be in this together. When faced with a decision of whether to pay a bit more to someone to help us jump a queue, or accept a discount in return for a favour, or avoid paying

a tax, we each have a choice. We can just go along with it, same old, same old and knowing that someone lower down will pay the price. Or we can say no and help break the chain of corruption. Perhaps that sounds idealistic. The cynics will certainly argue there will always be corruption in society, because people are too used to taking “shortcuts”. But while this may look attractive, individually we should think harder about it. In practice each “shortcut” is contributing to a greater cost which falls on all of us: 2.6 trillion US dollars each year.

I leave you with a thought. If the community of global citizens who live in this blessed country are serious about tackling corruption perhaps they should be making some simple demands. For transparency, not mud in the water. For accountability and taking responsibility, not shifting blame. For penalties for corruption, not impunity. For action, not talk.

I end with two pledges.

My first pledge is because the transnational nature of the corruption of cancer respects no borders. My first pledge is that I will do all I can to continue to bring to the government, civil society and people of this country British experience, expertise and cooperation to help Trinidad & Tobago fight corruption. Because it affects us all.

My second pledge is a personal one. I have in my hand here my completed application to join TTTI's membership. It will cost me 250 TT dollars. I would rather invest that to help TTTI tackle corruption in this country than continue without choice to pay the 2,500 dollars I mentioned at the outset, the sum which corruption is automatically costing me each year.

Thank you for inviting me to speak. And thank you for listening.