

# Capacity Building for Anti-Corruption in a post-COVID World

Mr President,

Vice-Presidents,

Distinguished NDB staff,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to be here to address you on the subject of Capacity Building for Anti-Corruption in a post-COVID World.

I would like to thank you for inviting me for this special address. The NDB and IACA both share the goal of supporting sustainable development, including in BRICS countries, and fighting corruption through education and training is key to achieving this goal. I see both of our organisations as very complementary in this regard and so I hope this event will mark the beginning of a fruitful relationship.

I will come back to this matter a bit later, but first let me address the impact of Covid-19 on capacity building initiatives, and how we can approach anti-corruption post-Covid-19. I will also highlight the International Anti-Corruption Academy's (IACA) rapid response to the pandemic and its plans for the future.

Covid-19 has changed the world in ways we could not have imagined just months ago. The response to the pandemic has created opportunities for corrupt practices and created new challenges for anti-corruption practitioners. IACA has sought to tackle these new challenges head on and has moved quickly to adapt its anti-corruption efforts accordingly.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently remarked, "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." Governments

all over the world have responded to the challenge of the pandemic by releasing emergency stimulus funds and granting contracts to private sector entities to aid in the response. These actions have created opportunities for corrupt individuals to take advantage of rushed procurement procedures and funds which have little oversight in place due to the speed at which they were introduced. This can result in a significant drain of resources which have been poured into the Covid-19 response.

In order to defend against these draining effects, we must provide our practitioners and front-line workers with the tools they need. Education and training are key to this. To fight corruption, you must first be able to recognise it and to understand it. This becomes even more critical in crisis situations when events move quickly, and greater vigilance is required. That is precisely the situation we find ourselves in now as economies start or are expected to start to reopen, hopefully for good this time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The International Anti-Corruption Academy, as both an international organisation and an educational institute, has been providing training and education in these areas since its inception almost ten years ago, and it has continued to do so throughout the pandemic. The Academy experienced a direct impact of Covid-19 on its various programmes and activities. March 2020 became a watershed moment when Covid-19 forced us to suspend in-person training. Our master's programmes have students from 5 continents and over 50 countries. Traditionally these students would come to the IACA campus for several weeks at a time throughout their studies. This was no longer an option.

IACA responded quickly and efficiently. As one of our Brazilian students pointed out, *"IACA changed tyres in a moving automobile."* As soon as restrictions on movement were introduced in Austria in March, the Academy swiftly moved all programme delivery into an online format. We managed to accomplish this in a matter of weeks without any loss of quality or delay in delivery. Since then, we have developed an extensive range of new open online trainings which will be launched over the coming months. IACA also

prepared short certification courses, with the belief that need for capacity building in anti-corruption, compliance and collective action has increased because of COVID 19.

IACA will continue to develop its capacity building activities going forward. We have learned from the pandemic that adaptability was key as the situation changed rapidly. But as the global health crisis hopefully abates, we can start planning for the longer term and reflecting on the future of capacity building in anti-corruption.

As we can see from IACA's experience, the basic logistics of providing capacity building support will be quite different post Covid-19. Our response to the pandemic has left us tools and methods which will prove useful even in the post pandemic world. Online delivery through e-learning platforms is more viable than ever and has a multitude of advantages over face-to-face delivery. IACA has been able to extend its reach to people who never could have travelled to Austria for financial or other reasons, and to deliver its course content to far larger groups of people than we could ever have fit into one classroom. While of course face-to-face interaction with teachers and networking with colleagues is useful, the advantages of online delivery cannot be denied. While IACA managed to adapt to online delivery quickly, we certainly were not prepared when the crisis struck, and this leads me to my next point.

Mr President,

One of the key lessons we can take away from our experience of this pandemic so far is that crisis preparedness should be included in anti-corruption capacity building in the future. Corruption thrives in times of crisis and the ongoing global pandemic is no exception.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Health Committee, in its resolution on how EU agencies and national governments responded to the H1 N1 2009 pandemic, noted several problems. These include:

1. the wasting of large sums of public money;
2. the lack of transparency of decision-making on the outbreak; and

3. The suspicion of the influence of the pharmaceutical industry on decisions taken during the pandemic response.

As governments race to source everything from food aid to face masks, they are prioritizing speed over transparency, dropping competitive bidding and other safeguards to keep pace with the pandemic. Food aid for struggling workers locked out of their jobs is proving to be a particularly juicy target with food aid disappearing as it passes through the bureaucracy in several hard-hit countries. The World Customs Organization and the World Health Organization published lists for Covid-19 medical supplies to facilitate cross-border movement through enhanced Customs clearance procedures at borders. This system has also been misused and linked to corruption in some cases.

Agencies which deal with crisis response must have adequate capacity to recognise corruption and protect against it. While officials of enforcement agencies should be trained to effectively respond to corruption cases, and contribute to preventing such cases, the business sector must also develop a value-based compliance system which focuses on building integrity in business activities.

Because of the prevailing conditions, education and training must remain the focus globally. IACA will continue to develop its academic programmes and endeavour to reach a wider reach. In terms of new academic content we are currently developing a new online master's programme as well as an executive diploma together with a UN partner organisation. Short-term certification courses are also being designed in multiple languages to ensure they have the widest reach possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While IACA is changing to meet the challenges of the pandemic, the global anti-corruption architecture is also undergoing change. Next year will see the holding of the United Nations Special Session against corruption (UNGASS 2021). This is important to highlight as the outcomes of the UNGASS could change how the international community approaches anti-corruption collectively. This will of course have an effect on

capacity building in this field too. While we don't know what changes the session will bring at this stage, we can assume that the impact of Covid-19 will feature in the discussions. Whatever future architecture emerges for global anti-corruption efforts, IACA will aim to place itself strategically to play an important role in supporting states to build their capacities where they need them most.

Mr. President,

In this same vein, I believe that IACA and NDB could jointly provide significant support to the BRICS countries as they battle the current crisis and its effects. Furthermore, preparing for the next crisis by building capacity in anti-corruption practitioners, procurement officials, and all those working on the front lines of the response is crucial as we go forward. This is where IACA can play an important role by sharing its expertise as a global centre for excellence in anti-corruption education.

Indeed, IACA already works very closely with several BRICS countries on these issues. The Academy regularly provides training for Indian anti-corruption practitioners while China and Russia are among the most active supporters of our work.

We would be pleased to explore the possibility of working with the NDB on projects to train officials from BRICS countries. Projects such as these have in a way become easier to implement as we have developed our own capacity for online training delivery.

We could also explore cooperation in research. The collection of lessons learned and best practices in various countries response to the pandemic, including from BRICS countries, will be an important activity as the current crisis eventually passes. As IACA rebuilds its research capacity this could be an area for fruitful cooperation.

When we have identified concrete areas for collaboration, we would be pleased to formalise our new partnership through an MoU or similar agreement.

Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It has been an honour to address you here on the International Anti-Corruption Day. This is always an important day in the calendar of IACA and so it was a pleasure to spend it with you.

As we go forward together into a changed world we must learn from our experiences and ensure that we equip ourselves with the tools to face the next challenges on the horizon.

For now, it seems we have reached a turning point in the pandemic in the form of the various vaccines which have become available. I believe we can have hope for better times coming very soon

I thank you for your attention.