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INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY - FOR SOUTH AFRICANS, THIS IS NOT JUST A FAR-OFF CAMPAIGN

By Theuns Eloff: Executive Director, FW de Klerk Foundation

The United Nations (UN) has numerous days on the annual calendar dedicated to some or other cause or campaign. Many of these pass by almost unnoticed. International Anti-Corruption Day, commemorated on 9 December every year, should not be one of those. For South Africans, this day, is (unfortunately) all too real.

The UN brought together a number of nations 15 years ago to adopt the *Convention Against Corruption*. Today, 186 states are party to the Convention and subscribe to its anti-corruption goals and ideals. In terms of the Convention, nearly every country in the world has laws in place making corruption a crime. Every country has further committed, through the well-known Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “to reducing corruption and bribery, strengthening the recovery and return of stolen assets and developing effective, inclusive and transparent institutions”.

The message of the Executive Director for this year’s commemoration, sounds like that of a South African politician: *United against corruption, we can foster a culture of lawfulness, help build accountable and transparent institutions, and enable people everywhere to access opportunities and live healthy and productive lives.*

For South Africans, still reeling under the impact of the Zupta regime, corruption is not just a way in which one or the other SDG in the far-off ‘third world’ is suppressed. It is not a theoretical concept in another country or another neighbourhood. For South Africans, it is with us, amongst us, part of our daily lives. We read about it in the news, we hear about it almost daily in the testimonies before the Zondo Commission and we experience its consequences in the now almost routine load-shedding we are faced with every day.

While it holds true universally that corruption is not limited to any specific sector of society, in South Africa it is widely recognised that we are faced with widespread corruption in our State institutions and civil service. We also know that corruption always “needs two to tango” and that it is not only civil servants who are guilty of corruption. The Steinhoff scandal and its economic effects on so many South Africans brought that fact home very clearly. Despite this, what makes South Africa different from many other countries, is that in some national departments, provinces and municipalities, corruption and bribery are indeed endemic.

Corruption is also not always a specific negative act of dishonesty. It is often the lack of action, in legal terms, an omission. It is to turn a blind eye to the fact that an industrial company pumps waste water into a river. In the South African context, and specifically in the case of the Vaal River, it is the lack of systems, maintenance of machinery and pure bad management by a local authority, allowing sewage to flow into a river upon which millions



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of South Africans are dependent for drinking water. The lack of responsible action, incapacity and mismanagement are either forms of corruption, or lead to corruption.

An organisation such as Corruption Watch has done outstanding work in not only raising awareness of corruption in South African society, but also launching campaigns to fight very specific instances of corruption over the past number of years. South Africa, however, needs more of that if we are to be successful in ridding our country of the scourge that is corruption. The Ramaphosa administration has a huge task to rid State institutions and the civil service of corruption - in its active and passive forms. But South Africans should, as individuals, start with ourselves, by asking the question: Do I (even if it is inadvertently) encourage or allow corruption in the workplace, on the road and in my personal finances? Should I not fearlessly point out examples of corruption that I observe?

In the end, the antidote to corruption is living, working and acting in an honest and transparent way. That is the best start to any fight against corruption.