

United Nations Development Programme



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Speech

**Press Briefing on the
UNDP Asia-Pacific Human Development Report
2008
*“Tackling Corruption, Transforming Lives”***

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12 June 2008
Kuala Lumpur

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Ramon V Navaratnam, President, Transparency International (TI) Malaysia

Distinguished guests

Members of the media

Selamat pagi dan salam sejahtera kepada semua para hadirin sekalian.

On behalf of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this briefing on the Asia-Pacific Human Development Report (APHDR) for 2008. The theme for this year's report is *Tackling Corruption, Transforming Lives*. The report is being released simultaneously in some key locations in the region today.

As a background, the APHDR focuses on issues that are of common concern to several countries in the region or that have sensitivities that are better addressed at the regional level or have clear cross-border dimensions. It is selected through consultations that include participants from within and outside UNDP and it is an independent intellectual exercise.

UNDP would like to record our sincerest gratitude to Tan Sri Navaratnam for taking time off from his busy schedule to present this report to our key stakeholders and for his good support to UNDP.

Distinguished guests:

The United Nations is built on the foundations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Preamble to that document talks of the inalienable rights of the human family to "freedom, justice and peace". Corruption is an immense threat to these rights. It undermines the very fabric of societies and human progress.

The APHDR builds on the successful conclusion of the Second Session of the Conference of State Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in Indonesia in January. The UNCAC is the first legally binding international anticorruption instrument, providing a unique opportunity for a global response to a global problem that pervades institutions within countries and crosses national borders.

Distinguished guests:

Corruption is a phenomenon that affects any country in the world. People across the Asia-Pacific region, as elsewhere, are becoming increasingly concerned about the scourge of corruption. They can see the damaging effects of it in the form of weakened national institutions, inequitable social services, and injustice in the courts, economic inefficiency and unchecked environmental exploitation. It is also evident that corruption hits the poor the hardest.

There are signs of growing support for anti-corruption action today. Responding to public concern, governments want to be seen to fight corruption, not enable it.

Civil society is also working to make the public and private sectors more accountable. The media is more aggressively exposing corruption.

In a diverse region like the Asia-Pacific, which is attempting the twin task of development and democratic consolidation, the problem of corruption cuts through the very core. It diminishes not only the outcomes we seek to achieve, but also corrodes the instruments and mechanisms we have at our disposal to do so.

In the words of former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, "Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign investment and aid."

The misleadingly termed 'petty corruption', which takes its toll on vast numbers of people, is just as weighty as 'grand corruption', which gets the lion's share of publicity. Cross-border issues, increasingly important for this rapidly globalizing region, are also explored in the report.

Distinguished guests:

Synthesizing various internationally recognized measures of corruption, the focus of this year's report on corruption from a human development lens reveals both challenges and opportunities ahead for countries in the region.

The APHDR makes a compelling case that a policy of "Zero tolerance" is the only practical solution. As the saying goes, the accomplice to the crime of corruption is frequently our own indifference. Every effort to crush corruption from the top should be complemented with strong engagement and involvement of the key pillars of civil society, including the media.

More importantly, the report proposes an agenda for change that should help Asia-Pacific combat the scourge of corruption. These steps should run parallel to and reinforce existing efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by improving developmental outcomes and creating the tools to deliver results.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In closing, the APHDR provides a coherent, comprehensive framework for tackling the problem of corruption within and between nations in the region. I am confident that the report will serve as a tool to facilitate effective policy responses and further debate in support of the pro-poor agenda.

I thank you once again for your presence here this morning.