



Session Report

Please know you may design the structure of this report to better suit the session. It's important to capture the key outcomes and solutions proposed for the future.

Session Title: Fireside Chat with Anthony Blinken

Date & Time: Saturday, 10.12.2022, 5:30 pm- 6:15 pm GMT -5

Report prepared by: Roberto Kukutschka, Research Expert
Transparency International Secretariat

Moderated by: Reuben Lifuka, Vice-Chair of the Board Transparency International

Panellists:

- Antony Blinken - US Secretary of State
- Rozina Islam - Journalist
- Steven Dojčinović - Founder and editor in chief of the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK)
- Janet Zhou - Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Coalition

Share the thematic focus of the session, it's purpose and corruption risks?

The session honored the 2022 Anti-Corruption Champion Award winners and was meant to illustrate what the anti-corruption fight looks like on the ground.

- **Rozina Islam:** journalist that has broken several corruption stories in her country Bangladesh and how public officials exploited loopholes to deviate funds during the COVID 19 pandemic in the country.
- **Stevan Dojčinović:** He is a founder and editor in chief of the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK).
- **Janet Zhou:** executive director of the Zimbabwe Coalition on debt and development. She works to increase citizen agency to demand accountability and transparency in the country. Through the #howfar campaign she raises awareness of the governments responsibilities.

Summary of panellists' contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

Corruption is a national security challenge. Corruption makes more difficult and exacerbates all other problems.

"In our efforts to strengthen democracy nothing is more corrosive or does more to undermine citizen's trust than corruption." - **Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State**

There are a number of common denominators that the winners of the Anti-Corruption Awards bring to the table:

- Innovative use of technology to uncover corruption,
- Efforts made to raise awareness about impunity and its impact on people's daily life and generate demand for change,
- Mentoring of newer generations of anti-corruption leaders,
- Pockets of transparency and accountability can be nurtured
- Defending the rights of marginalized communities is a hallmark of the anti-corruption work
- Shedding light on how corruption weakens the ability of governments to deliver
- Efforts have brought justice to victims and their families
- Each awardee faced moments of doubt, but they overcame them and carried on, which sets a powerful example for others.

Janet Zhou - Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Coalition explained that innovation does not necessarily have to be a complex matter. The innovation that she relied on was that simplicity is the best sophistication when it comes to engaging with citizens. Speaking technical language when it comes to accountability or corruption (e.g. illicit financial flows, graft or embezzlement) does not bring anything, it is important to use the people's language and use the same lingo that citizens use. The result was that citizens learned to connect that language with corruption. Corruption needs to be communicated in a simple way that makes it easy to understand and relatable: people do not generally understand, for example, how the national debt relates to their daily lives or how corruption in spending affects them.

Rozina Islam – Journalist explained that exposing corruption is the main contribution that journalists can do. She told the story of how she was incarcerated for reporting on corruption-related issues linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stevan, on the other hand, mentioned how they rely on a lot of technology, artificial intelligence and data analysis to report on corruption, but that ultimately what helps the most is telling a good story. In terms of how he frames the story, he mentioned the importance of not looking just as corruption as a national issue, but also as a transnational one and establish the links between different organized crime groups or dictators across borders.

The three panellists were then asked what the most significant corruption challenges were.

- Ms. Zhou mentioned the issue of impunity and the rampant grant corruption that links all corruption and affects the local, national and global levels. She explained how in many countries corruption remains a challenge despite institutions and legal frameworks that have been put in place, but that often remain underused or ineffective. She called for everyone to end impunity and recover the funds lost to corruption. Allies at all levels (local, national and international) and across sectors (public and private) need to work together to go after the corrupt.
- Ms. Islam stressed the importance of working on security and press freedom so that journalists can continue to bring corruption to light. She reminded the audience of the number of journalists that are routinely jailed around the world, but particularly in Bangladesh and how they require support from international networks.
- Mr. Dojčinović discussed the links between organized crime, corruption and state capture. He mentioned how journalism and reporting should be seen as a public good and the importance of supporting investigative reporters to tell their own stories.

Mr. Blinken then asked the panellists what the anti-corruption community present at the conference could help support journalists. Ms. Zhou talked about the importance of ensuring the security of journalists not only from governments, but also from private sector through strategic litigation. Mr. Dojčinović mentioned also the threat of SLAP lawsuits, particularly in countries where judicial independence is limited. He praised the idea of the Journalist Shield program from the US government, but mentioned the need to go beyond that to also defend journalists from smear campaigns.

Main outcomes of session (include quotes/highlights and interesting questions from the floor)

- *“Reporting should be seen as a public good or like a public service. Nowadays it is almost impossible to have an investigative team and be sustainable.”* **Stevan Dojčinović - Founder and editor in chief of the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK)**
- *“Defending oneself is a big part of being an investigative journalist.”* **Stevan Dojčinović - Founder and editor in chief of the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK)**
- *“It is important to make anti-corruption activists feel safe and to ensure them that they have the support from the international community.”* **Jeannette Zhou - Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Coalition**

Key recommendations for the future and concrete follow-up actions

- Donors need to invest more in supporting investigative journalism
- Need to protect journalists not only from government threats, but also from SLAP lawsuits from the private sector, which are costly and time consuming.
- Need for better designed donor programmes for investigative journalists.

Rapporteur's name and date submitted

Roberto Kukutschka, 11.12.2022