

ADB HOSTS MEETING OF JOINT ADB/OECD ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

MANILA, PHILIPPINES (10 September 2009) – Strengthening the independence and accountability of anti-corruption agencies is key to poverty reduction and sustainable development in the Asia and Pacific region, participants at an anti-corruption seminar in Manila heard on Wednesday.

Speaking at the "Regional Seminar on the Political Economy of Corruption", Asian Development Bank (ADB) Vice-President Ursula Schaefer-Preuss said that corruption remains a major impediment to development in many countries, with bribery alone totaling about \$1 trillion globally every year.

To combat illegitimate transactions, Ms. Schaefer-Preuss called for "an enabling environment for improving the independence and accountability of the anti-corruption agencies that play a critical role in the effective fight against corruption."

The seminar, organized by the ADB/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific, and held at ADB Headquarters in Manila, brings together government representatives and anti-corruption officials from 28 countries and jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific region. Other international organizations involved in the fight against corruption are also participating.

The opening session of the seminar was followed by a keynote address on "Anti-Corruption and the Sustainable Development Agenda" by Huguette Labelle, Chair of Transparency International.

"Corruption is a scourge that undermines the effectiveness of aid and throws barriers in the way of the political and economic changes that are fundamental to development," said Ms. Labelle. "It steals away the resources intended to alleviate the suffering of the poorest."

William Loo, Manager of the Asia-Pacific Outreach Programme at the OECD's Anti-Corruption Division, said: "Ensuring that prosecutorial discretion is not influenced by political factors is one of the top priorities of the States Parties to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. This seminar will give the Asia-Pacific region a chance to add its unique perspective to global discussions on this issue."

The two-day seminar focuses on the interaction of political and economic processes in society, and how these impact corruption. One major issue is the importance of strengthening the independence of government bodies involved in fighting corruption, such as anti-corruption commissions, prosecutorial authorities, state audit institutions and the judiciary, as well as the role of parliament in supporting the independence of these institutions.

The contribution of international legal instruments such as the UN Convention Against Corruption and OECD Anti-Bribery Convention in preventing political intervention in anti-corruption efforts will be reviewed with examples from two of the Initiative's member countries (Philippines and Bangladesh) and parties from the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. Corruption in the natural resources sector, an issue of paramount importance in the Asia and Pacific region, will also be discussed.

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Notes to editors:

The ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific hosts regional seminars regularly. The last seminar took place in Macao, People's Republic of China (PRC), in March 2009 on the theme "*Good Practices in Corruption Prevention*". The seminars are organized as capacity building events and the themes are decided by the Initiative's member countries and jurisdictions. The seminars also provide a forum for sharing experiences and learning from each other.

The Initiative was established in 1999 to help governments in the Asia-Pacific region meet international anti-corruption standards. Its Anti-Corruption Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific sets out the goals and standards for fighting economic, political and social corruption in the region. To date, 28 countries and economies from Asia and the Pacific have endorsed the Plan and agreed on implementation mechanisms to achieve its standards. The plan encourages effective and transparent public services, strong anti-bribery actions, and integrity in business operations. It supports the objectives of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

The Initiative supports members' anti-corruption reform efforts by fostering policy dialogue and measuring progress, conducting analysis in support of policy dialogue, and building capacity to enable members to fully implement their reform programmes.

The following economies are members of the ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific: Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; PRC; Cook Islands; Fiji Islands; Hong Kong, PRC; India; Indonesia; Japan; Kazakhstan; Korea; Kyrgyz Republic; Macao, PRC; Malaysia; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Vanuatu; and Vietnam.