

ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia-Pacific

4th regional anti-corruption conference for Asia and the Pacific

PRESS RELEASE

ASIA-PACIFIC AGREES ON NEED FOR SUSTAINED FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA (5 December 2003) – Delegates from over 35 Asia-Pacific countries, wrapping-up the three-day Conference on Combating Corruption here today agreed that regional and sub regional cooperation was critical because it allows countries to share anti-corruption experiences and efforts. Delegates also endorsed the need for training to deal with complex corruption issues. They agreed that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Anti-Corruption Initiative is an integral component of current international development and that it should provide assistance in the establishment of domestic anti-corruption policies and projects in the framework of reform efforts under the Action Plan.

In his keynote address, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi informed participants that Malaysia would put in place a National Integrity System to fight corruption. He announced that the government had approved a RM17 million (US\$4.47million) allocation for the setting-up of a regional anti-corruption academy that would function " as a regional centre for anti-corruption capacity building, promoting best practices in investigations, monitoring and enforcement, and in newer areas such as forensic accounting and forensic engineering."

Only two years after its endorsement in Tokyo by 17 Asia-Pacific countries, the Initiative's key instrument—the Anti-Corruption Action Plan for Asia-Pacific- is already bearing fruit. The adherence of a growing number of countries testifies to the attractiveness of the Plan's three core principles: a focus on both prevention –including an active civic involvement- and punishment in order to deter corruption; an approach which is comprehensive and systematic; and feasibility and effectiveness as a priority.

Australia announced at the Conference's opening session its endorsement of the regional Action Plan. "Australia's endorsement of the Action Plan is an important symbol of its commitment to combating corruption both domestically and in the Asia Pacific region," said Ms. Kate Rowson Johnston of the Australian Agency for International Development, in her address. "It means we will now be able to more actively share our anti-corruption experiences and efforts with other countries in the region", she added.

Australia became the 21st country to endorse the Action Plan after Cambodia and Hong-Kong, China joined the Group of endorsing countries early this year. "Through participating in the Action Plan, we hope to share our experience and further contribute to this meaningful cause on the anti-corruption front," said Mr. Andrew Wong, Director of Administration of the Hong Kong SAR, in his address. Endorsement of the Plan marks Hong Kong's participation in a regional anti-corruption initiative for the first time and underlines its long-standing determination to fight corruption domestically and strengthen international cooperation in tackling this insidious ill that knows no border.

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The discussion of progress made by countries of the region since the endorsement of the Action Plan during the three-day session showed the evolvement of the legal and institutional frameworks to stem corruption over the past two years. Experiences and good practices have been spreading throughout the region. New institutions or tools are inspired by successful models of neighbouring countries. Commitment and will among the Asia-Pacific community to fight corruption has increased, including under challenging political conditions and people have become more sensitive and conscious of the issue.

However the conference also portrayed that the battle against corruption is not yet won. OECD Deputy Secretary General Mr. Kiyoo Akasaka stated in his opening speech that “in many areas, the effective implementation of anti-corruption measures still lies ahead”. ADB Vice-President, Knowledge and Management and Sustainable Development, Mr. Geert van der Linden, in his opening address stated that “successful anti-corruption programs depend on publicly available information, political leadership, and collective action”.

Targeted capacity-building workshops provided participants with the opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge in a number of areas that are the root of some of the shortcomings such as the use and protection of whistleblowers, forensic accounting in order to cope with complex corruption crimes, detection of corruption in public procurement, and transnational judicial cooperation.

The meeting was the fourth annual conference of the ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative in which more than 200 delegates, from 35 countries of the Asia-Pacific region - comprising ministers and senior anti-corruption policy makers, investigators and prosecutors, representatives of the private sector and of the non-governmental sector and of the international donor community- attended to exchange experiences in designing and implementing anti-corruption policies, discuss mechanisms that have proved to be effective in curbing corruption and strengthen regional cooperation to lay the foundation for a sustained fight against corruption in Asia-Pacific. The Conference was organised by the ADB and the OECD in cooperation with the Anti-Corruption Agency of Malaysia.

The conference followed a two-day meeting of the Action Plan Steering Group, made up of all endorsing countries, that discussed participating countries reform projects under the Action Plan; prepared the Plan's second implementation phase and activities to be undertaken over the coming 18 months; and adopted a stocktaking report on the current legal and institutional anti-corruption framework to facilitate evaluation of progress in the future and assist in identifying additional capacity building needs.

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