

Center Report Finds Democratic Institutions Flawed in 25 Countries

Washington, April 29, 2004 - Not one country out of 25 surveyed achieved the top rating for anti-corruption practices, the Center for Public Integrity disclosed today at a press conference introducing its innovative Public Integrity Index.

That is one of many findings of the Global Integrity Report, offering unprecedented quantitative, qualitative and comparative information on national institutions that prevent abuses of power and promote public integrity.

According to the Center's findings - based on a year-long study of corruption in 25 countries around the world - no single country achieved a "very strong" ranking on the Public Integrity Index, a measure of the existence and effectiveness of laws and institutions that promote public accountability and limit corruption, and the access that citizens have to information with which they can hold their government accountable.

"This study shows that no country -- regardless of wealth, size or population -- is immune from corruption," noted Charles Lewis, executive director of the Center, who conceived of the project.

Of the five tiers ("very strong," "strong," "moderate," "weak," "very weak"), just six countries ranked "strong": the United States, which finished first, followed by Portugal, Australia, Italy, Germany and South Africa. Seven countries - the Philippines, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Venezuela and Ghana - received "moderate" rankings, while Nigeria, Panama, Nicaragua, Ukraine, India, Indonesia, Namibia, Turkey, Russia and Kenya received "weak" scores. Guatemala and Zimbabwe, the other two countries surveyed, finished in the "very weak" category.

Findings The Global Integrity project found that acceptable standards of democracy are not maintained in many of the countries studied. Among the

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In 18 of the countries, there are no laws to protect civil servants who report corruption-- whistle blowers -- from recrimination or other negative consequences; all but two countries were "very weak" regarding whistle-blower protections;

In 15 of the countries, journalists investigating corruption had been imprisoned, physically harmed or killed;

In three countries, Guatemala, Mexico and Zimbabwe, both journalists and judges have been physically harmed in the past year;

In 14 of the countries, the head of state cannot be prosecuted for corruption;

In six countries, the ruling party controls two-thirds or more of the seats in the national legislature, reducing the opposition parties' ability to enhance government accountability;

In seven of the countries, the top executive branch official is not required to file a personal financial disclosure form, preventing the public from seeing what private interests its leader has.

The report also found that the phenomenon of money buying political favors is international in scope (examples are in the executive summary) and that political party finances are secret in 10 of the 25 countries that hold elections this year.

Lewis praised the innovative new method of measuring institutions and their effectiveness to limit corrupt practices. "Corruption cannot thrive in an environment where the public is informed as to the true extent and specific nature of abuses of power -- sunshine is the best disinfectant, as the saying goes," he said. "This new approach will enable the public to identify weaknesses in institutions and laws that could be strengthened."

For the study, a team of over 150 social scientists, journalists, researchers, writers and editors collected data on 80 indicators-measures of the presence and effectiveness of anti-corruption mechanisms-divided across six broad categories: civil society, public information and media; electoral and political process; branches of government; administration and civil service; oversight and regulatory mechanisms; and anti-corruption mechanisms and rule of law. The indicators allowed Center researchers to quantify each country's response to corruption.

In addition to the quantitative measurements, the Global Integrity project provides country reports that include:

country facts, or basic statistical data on population, the economy and the political environment; a corruption timeline, which offers a unique political/historical timeline of significant corruption-related events; a corruption notebook, a 2,000-word original essay by a leading investigative journalist from each country; an integrity assessment, a 3,000-word report compiled by a lead social scientist in each country to highlight the main features of each of the six main categories that make up the Integrity Indicators; an integrity scorecard ranking each country according to the indicators.

Other features assessed by the Public Integrity Index include participation; accountability, such as giving reasons for policy decisions; immunity from prosecution; conflict-of-interest regulations; and safety -- i.e., freedom from threats in terms of being injured, harmed, or killed. (See the Methodology for more information.)

The countries studied-including the largest democracy on each continent-were chosen to generate a sample with geographic, economic and political diversity. The selection of countries includes six from Africa and seven from Latin America.

The project manager for the study is Marianne Camerer, a native of South Africa who joined the Center in January 2003, having earlier piloted the Global Access methodology in South Africa, and also previously consulted for the United Nations Global Programme Against Corruption, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Transparency International.

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For more information contact Ann Pincus (202) 481-1234;
Nathan Kommers (202) 481 -1221