

Restore Integrity to the Public Office

By: Lailuma Nasiri

Sadly, Afghanistan this year again earned the dubious title of the top corrupt country in the world along side North Korea and Somalia according to Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2013.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption requires each member state to fight corruption by adopting laws, promoting international cooperation, recovering stolen assets, and facilitating the exchange of information between private and public sectors.

After ten years of the international community's intervention in rebuilding Afghanistan, it is abundantly clear that Afghanistan is marred in corruption and continues to be a significant and growing problem. Corruption undermined public trust in the government of Afghanistan and considerably reduced the legitimacy of the justice institutions. Corruption also diminished respect for the rule of law, but most significantly, it threatens this young democracy.

In 2011, as a young Afghan woman witnessing the re-birth of my nation and striving to see the Afghanistan of my parents' days, yet under the 21st century lens, I along with like minded Afghan colleagues decided to open an Afghan NGO to continue the efforts of building our country long after the international friends depart. As a result, Afghanistan Justice Organization was established in partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth



Office (FCO) of the British Embassy in Kabul to not only carry out the mandate of the FCO's commitment to reforming and building the Afghan justice system, but to build a premier Non-Governmental Organization capable of continuing this reform and capacity building long before the withdrawal of the International Community.

We found the perfect partner in the FCO. The United Kingdom's engagement in Afghanistan is part of a 49-nation collation to prevent international terrorism from using, again, Afghanistan as a base from which to operate. In addition to supporting the Afghan police by providing advance civilian policing skills in Helmand and Kabul, the UK, through FCO and the Development for International Aid (DFID), has also supported re-building of the justice sector since 2002.



As we approach the **against corruption today** day, we reflect upon the last decade's efforts in the fight against corruption in Afghanistan as well as the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead post-2014.

Since the international intervention in 2001, Afghanistan has come a long way in every major sectors of society specifically in the fight against corruption. Admittedly, mistakes have been made by both the Afghans and international partners, whether part of the justification of nation building or not, the fact is today Afghanistan is and can be in a position to actively engage in mitigating corruption in both public and private sectors. Afghanistan established an anti-corruption strategy, and its implementation plan, promulgated laws criminalizing acts constituting corruption; created special anti-corruption prosecutor's offices, and tribunals in several provinces, and a special office overseeing the administration and anti-corruption efforts of the government.

Since late 2011, the FCO and AJO have been steadfast and strong partners in implementing programs in Afghanistan. In the last two years, AJO in partnership with the FCO-BEK had outstanding achievements with the Attorney General Office efforts on Anti-Corruption and Anti-Money Laundering as well as with the non-financial institutions, i.e., Hawala (money transfer), real estate association and jewelers. AJO with supported the efforts of the Attorney General's office in establishing specialized prosecutor's offices in Hirat and Nangarhar. AJO has so far trained over 300 judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and police on anti-corruption, anti-money laundering and counter-narcotics laws, as well as held several seminars, conferences and workshops as part of the public awareness campaign. AJO organized and conducted exchange programs and study tours to Tunisia and Turkey connecting Afghans prosecutors, judges and police with the regional professionals for exchange of ideas, learning, and continued networking.

AJO is currently holding a weekly radio program broadcasted by Afghanistan National Radio on raising public awareness about corruption and its negative impact on social and economic aspect of citizen's daily lives. Understanding the role of media in combating corruption, AJO designed and established a media communication center called the Afghan Zariza (Millennium – <http://www.afghanzariza.com>) and is training investigative journalists to investigate and report corruption related matters, specifically predatory corruption. AJO is also publishing pamphlets, brochures, and newsletters and distributing to public as tools in raising awareness.

In comparison to the level of corruption in the country, the level of efforts made to fight corruption has been much less. Fighting corruption requires much more efforts and adequate resources and short term programs and project are not effective and will not result in mitigating corruption as intended especially in light of the imminent withdrawal of the International Forces and support in December 2014.

The Afghan government and the international community committed to support Afghanistan must work on long-term effective programs and projects that can ensure a corruption free Afghanistan. In fighting corruption, alongside strengthening rule of law, effective management and leadership, understanding of rights and responsibilities, reward and punishment, monitoring

and evaluation, audit and investigation are necessary components that must be implemented in concert to achieve real change.

The specific focus should be on strengthening civil societies and media in continuing to campaign against corruption, educate and engage citizenry, and advocate for access to information pursuant to law. As Bank Ki-moon's message for the International Anti-Corruption Day in 2012 states that ***“as the international community strives to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and forge an agenda for economic and social progress in the years beyond, addressing the problem of corruption becomes all the more urgent”***, as an Afghan heading an NGO, it gives me great hope in the brighter future of my country knowing that while the international community will leave in a year time, yet the partnership is forged and the support will continue to fight side-by-side the evils of corruption that has marred our country.

I am doing my part to build my country, and on this special occasion, I ask my fellow Afghans to join me and do their parts to build our country.

Lailuma Nasiri is the co-founder and vice president of Afghanistan Justice Organization, an NGO committed to build and reform the rule of law in Afghanistan. <http://www.afghanjustice.org>