

ICHA 2023 Forum: Opening Ceremony Remarks

Welcoming Message by Shaolin Yang, Managing Director
and World Bank Group Chief Administrative Officer
for the International Corruption Hunters Alliance Forum
Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire – 14 June 2023

~ As prepared for delivery ~

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be in Abidjan to welcome everyone here—as well as those who are joining us online—to the World Bank Group's International Corruption Hunters Alliance forum or, as we call it, ICHA.

It is my honor to speak alongside our distinguished guests, including Vice President Koné, Deputy Prime Minister Correia, and Minister Ballo.

On behalf of the World Bank Group and our offices that co-organized this event, our Integrity Vice Presidency (INT) and our Western and Central Africa Regional Vice Presidency, let me thank the Government of Côte d'Ivoire—in particular its Ministry for the Promotion of Good Governance, Capacity Building, and the Fight against Corruption—who have been enthusiastic hosts and partners in bringing this event together. We are also grateful to the government and people of Cote d'Ivoire for their warm hospitality.

Let me also thank our supporting partners in this event, the UNODC's Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities, as well as Transparency International, and the global youth group Accountability Lab.

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The World Bank Group organized the first ICHA conference in 2010 to highlight the importance of anticorruption as an imperative for development, and to strengthen the global network of partners engaged in the fight against corruption.

Since that inaugural event, the ICHA forum has been held in Washington, DC, Paris, and Copenhagen. And we are pleased to be bringing this important gathering to Africa for the first time, to continue the dialogue among the global collection of anticorruption actors assembled here today.

Let us be frank – corruption is a cancer that is present in all countries. It manifests itself in many ways and, with advances in technology, has increasingly become a transnational challenge without respect for borders.

Thus, platforms like ICHA, which bring together not only frontline anticorruption professionals like investigators, auditors, and prosecutors, but also policy makers who can shape the legal frameworks for dealing with corruption, as well as representatives from academia and civil society—often the eyes, ears, and voices on the ground who can call out corruption—are of critical importance.

We all have a collective role to play, and I hope over the next three days, we can engage and learn from one another’s experiences about how we can leverage our collective action to fight corruption, particularly in the context of the serious challenges our world is facing today—including pandemics, conflict, or climate change.

Just as a popular proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”.

For the World Bank Group, fighting corruption in development has been a commitment in our operational work for nearly three decades, and it remains a top priority for our institution.

Corruption poses a threat to the success of our collective development goals. It harms the poor the most, increasing costs and reducing access to basic services, such as health, education, justice, and electricity. It exacerbates inequality.

Over time, corruption can undermine the trust and confidence that citizens have for their leaders and institutions, creating social friction and in some contexts increasing the risk of fragility, conflict, and violence.

If unaddressed, corruption can also undermine a country’s response to emergencies, blunting the impact of the response to a crisis for those most in need, leading to unnecessary suffering and, at worst, death.

These are significant concerns that require determined and deliberate action.

We emphasize transparency and accountability in the work with our clients and are committed to strong fiduciary standards for our operations, including emergency operations.

For example, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the World Bank Group was committing historic levels of financial support to countries facing the crisis, we did not dilute our fiduciary standards for operations responding to the pandemic.

Indeed, our institution's Anticorruption Guidelines remained in effect and applied to borrowers as well as anyone working for them under a project-funded contract.

Our teams drew on years of our institution's investigations into fraud and corruption to account for integrity risks upstream, during a project's design, and to monitor them throughout implementation.

The World Bank's commitment to fighting corruption is also reflected in robust mechanisms across the institution that enhance the integrity of our operations.

Our Integrity Vice Presidency is an independent office that works to detect, deter, and prevent fraud and corruption in the projects we finance, as well as investigates allegations involving World Bank Group staff or corporate vendors.

INT investigates the facts of the allegations and, if they are substantiated, pursues sanctions against the companies and people involved.

However, any sanctions imposed are ultimately determined through our two-tiered sanctions system, which includes the Office of Suspension and Debarment and the Sanctions Board.

At the first tier, the Bank's Chief Suspension and Debarment Officer determines if INT's allegations are supported by sufficient evidence and, if so, recommends a sanction, which usually involves a period of debarment.

We afford the entities at the center of the allegations the opportunity to provide credible explanations to account for the allegations, including an opportunity to appeal the recommendation to the system's second tier, the World Bank Group Sanctions Board, which is composed of a panel of external experts. The Sanctions Board will conduct a fresh review of the accusation and the recommended sanction and a full hearing, if requested by the parties or called by the Sanctions Board Chair.

In this way, we protect the World Bank's funds and, at the same time, ensure that our sanctions processes are fair and transparent for all involved.

Moreover, our institution's approach to accountability does not end with sanctions. Through our Integrity Compliance Office, we engage with many sanctioned entities and work with them to improve their business practices as a condition for release from our sanctions.

Through these efforts, the World Bank also helps to support a cleaner private sector with higher business standards in the places where we operate.

Thus, both in our operations around the world as well as our internal processes, the World Bank Group remains vigilant against corruption.

I am pleased to see the World Bank's International Corruption Hunters Alliance renew itself as an event and inaugurate a new phase to bring the global expertise of the ICHA network closer to the regions where our institution operates.

One of the reasons the World Bank chose Cote d'Ivoire as the host country for this event is to acknowledge the efforts of the government towards fighting against corruption and the significant progress that has been made so far.

For the entire international community, fighting corruption is both our moral duty and one of the best possible strategies for economic development. All of us here today will need to do more to stop corruption. Indeed, we will only eradicate this global epidemic through true global partnership.

The entire World Bank Group is ready to work with all of you to make the vision of a corruption-free world a reality.

Thank you for this opportunity. I wish you all the best for a successful ICHA 2023 forum.
