More than 1,000 people from 135 countries were gathered in Bangkok’s Sirikit National Convention Center for the opening ceremony.

Barry O’Keefe, the IACC’s Chair, emphasised the conference’s role as ‘an assembly of action’ tasked with arriving at concrete plans to address corruption. He noted that while corruption is now recognised as ‘in a word, evil’, rhetoric instead of action has led to a breakdown in public trust. He called on the great reservoirs of wisdom at the IACC to be shared to redress this lack of trust in ‘order that we can look back and say that was a job well done’.

The need for practical solutions was reiterated by Panthep Klanarongran, Chair of the Thai National Anti-Corruption Commission, who extended the call to engage in frank debate and exchange on the common challenge in order to ‘provide the global anti-corruption community with clearer direction and stronger vision’.

Huguette Labelle, Chair of Transparency International, observed that corruption’s persistence shows that systemic change is needed, and ‘only by bringing together different streams can we craft solutions that match the complexity of the task.’ She hoped that the conference would gather momentum for ratification of the UN Convention against Corruption, and that governments and the private sector would meet their pledges. She also urged participants to remember ‘that our work is important to those who have the least’, and that successful efforts have the potential to lift billions out of poverty.

Secretory General of TI Thailand, Dr. Juree Vichit-Vadakan stressed that our fight against corruption should not lose sight of its fundamental root causes. She stated that democratic values must be translated into belief systems, and values of anti-corruption and justice needed to be embedded in the consciousness of society, as ‘without social justice, prosperity cannot thrive’.

The opening ceremony concluded with a speech by the Thai Minister of Justice, Pirapan Salirathavibhaga, who listed the efforts made in Thailand, including the investigative authority of the National Anti-Corruption Commission. However, he emphasised that fighting corruption is becoming increasingly difficult through globalisation and transnational crime in international trade, which he likened to ‘a form of cancer that spreads and takes the life of a person.’ He recognised that the IACC could provide a huge step in overcoming this ‘corruption cancer’.

The 14th IACC participants were then welcomed by the Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.
The leaders of the world's conflicts — and the ability to secure sustained and lasting peace — are well recognised: the ability to combat poverty, address organised crime networks and fulfil human rights obligations. The common thread among each of these aims being how corruption serves to undermine advances on them and facilitates increased instability.

The ‘Peace, Security and Corruption’ plenary attempted to unravel the connections among these three areas and the responses needed for change. While poverty, human rights violations and organised crime are problems that blight many countries, the emphasis was placed on post-conflict countries and fragile states. It is this unfortunate group of nations, from Afghanistan to Somalia, that fall at the bottom of indices looking at corruption, development and human rights.

But being a post-conflict country does not mean that nothing can be done or that such problems apply to them alone. As Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, noted in the case of a government respecting and fulfilling human rights, it is ‘more a matter of choice than the capability of states’.

In this sense, addressing the corruption that may be fuelling human rights violations or worsening poverty, which in turn are driving conflicts, is as much a question of addressing governance and the rule of law in a country. The push of 180 million people into poverty as a result of the financial and economic crises underscores how breakdowns in governance can turn into a destabilising force.

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The Thai Prime Minister Vejjajiva opened the forum defining corruption as ‘a global menace’, where responses will be measured only by hard results.

President of the Asian Development Bank Haruhiko Kuroda labelled corruption ‘a tax on the poor’, with 900 million people living in Asia on US$1.25 a day or less. He explained that ADB embraces inclusive growth, guided by policies of good governance. The ADB has joined other regional banks in an agreement to debar any partners found guilty of wrongdoing. He concluded that ‘change will only come when the voice for change is louder than the voice of the status quo’.

World Bank Managing Director Sri Mulyani Indrawati saw developments in fighting corruption as a ‘cup that may be half full but leaking’. In the World Bank, corruption was once a whispered term but is now mainstreamed. She identified stepping up enforcement, including prosecutions, lack of follow-up on national investigations, and increased use of the World Bank’s Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative (STAR) as critical challenges.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated via video that while the fight is not easy, anti-corruption work makes a difference, whether through promoting social media or assisting in prosecution. She expressed that ‘the US is a partner’ in this fight and will be one of the first states to be reviewed under the UN Convention against Corruption, and that they support just and honest government.

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The Leadership Forum

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Until recently, heads of state suspected of pillaging national coffers and filling foreign bank accounts have hidden safely inside their mansions. But in a milestone challenge, Transparency International France and its partner organisation Sherpa have fought to bring to court a case against three African presidents and some of their relatives: Republic of the Congo’s Denis Sassou-Nguesso, Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon’s Omar Bongo (now deceased).

Lodged in December 2008, the complaint calls for an investigation into how the presidents financed acquisitions in France worth far more than they officially earn. Their lawyers deny any diversion of public funds. Yet previous police investigations found President Bongo and his relatives owned 39 French properties, 70 bank accounts and nine luxury cars; President Sassou-Nguesso’s family, 18 properties and 112 bank accounts; and President Obiang’s family, €4.2 million-worth (US $5.85 million) of luxury cars (his son, who earns a monthly government salary of US $4,000 (€2,875), also has a Malibu mansion worth US $35 million (€25 million).

A courageous Gabonese citizen, Gregory Ngbwa Mintsa, joined TI France in lodging the complaint, seeking redress for personal damages and damages suffered by the entire nation.

In May 2009, a magistrate accepted the lawsuit, opening the way for an investigation into how the assets were acquired. Previous lawsuits brought by the TI chapter had been rejected by the courts, but this time it was accepted as a plaintiff because the claims of the complaint directly harm its interests, namely fighting corruption. But Mintsa’s case as a taxpayer was dismissed. He declined to appeal on grounds of personal safety.

Within two days the public prosecutor’s office appealed the May ruling, blocking the judicial investigation. In October, the complaint was found inadmissible. However, TI France took the fight to the French Supreme Court and their efforts were rewarded – on Tuesday the court took a landmark decision and called for an investigation.

IACC today talked to TI France’s Vice President Jacques Terray and Managing Director Julien Coll, and Gregory Ngbwa Mintsa about the legal milestone which has struck a stunning blow against impunity.

Congratulations to you all on the ruling. What’s next?

Jacques: Thank you! First of all this is a Supreme Court ruling, so it is the final decision. There is no going back and we look forward to seeing the truth come out. The next step is a judicial inquiry into how these houses, cars and bank accounts were acquired. We also expect the inquiry to shed light on the role played by various French intermediaries who might have facilitated operations identified as suspects by the French police.

Julien: This decision is a major step forward. Besides the progress made for the recovery of stolen assets, it will allow civil society to overcome the inertia of the state prosecutor in cases which are highly sensitive from a political point of view. In time we hope that it will lead to a better implementation of the right to restitution as guaranteed by the UN Convention against Corruption. This would really allow entire populations to recover stolen assets, which is what the entire case was founded on.

Gregory, what spurred you to join the complaint?

Gregory: For me it was a question of social justice. I felt that as a citizen of this country I had a responsibility to take action to defend our liberties ourselves. We had an historic responsibility to pursue and put an end to this because the consequences and impact on people’s lives is grave.

Photos from day 1
**Did you know?**

Known as the "Land of Smiles", Bangkok personifies Thailand's nickname. The warmth and hospitality of the Thai people is evident the moment you arrive in the country.

**Tip of the day**

No visit to Bangkok is complete without paying a visit to the Grand Palace, formerly home to the Thai Royal Family. Construction of the palace began in 1782 after the capital moved across the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok. More than 200 years later, the palace is still one of the city's main landmarks. Whether it is the distinct and stunning architecture or the Royal Court that lures, a visit to the Grand Palace will certainly not disappoint.

**How to say**

สวัสดี sa-wat-dee
Good morning, good evening, good afternoon, good night, hello, good-bye

สวัสดีครับ sawatdee krup
Hello (male speaker)

สวัสดีค่ะ sawatdee kaa
Hello (female speaker)

กรุณา ga-ru-nah
Please

ขอบคุณ kop koon
Thank you

**Useful information**

Tourist Police: 1155
Ambulance and Rescue: 1554
Medical Emergency: 1669

**Social media**

14th IACC social media pages including the blog: www.14iacc.org/social

Twitter: www.twitter.com/14iacc

If you are tweeting, please mark your tweets with the hashtag #14iacc

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