**Intersessional panel discussion on challenges and good practices in the prevention of corruption, and the impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Opening remarks by Nada Al-Nashif**

**United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**

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Your Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Dear participants,

It is my honour to welcome you to this intersessional panel discussion. And let me start by thanking our partner the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for co-organizing this important event.

The threats posed by corruption to the stability and security of societies are being increasingly recognised.

Last year, the General Assembly adopted a [common commitment](https://undocs.org/A/RES/S-32/1) to effectively prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation, noting that corruption is “undermining the institutions and values of democracy, our ethical values and justice, and jeopardizing sustainable development and the rule of law”. The [UN system organizations](https://ungass2021.unodc.org/uploads/ungass2021/documents/session1/contributions/UN_Common_Position_to_Address_Global_Corruption_Towards_UNGASS2021.pdf) have pledged to support Member States in this endeavour, and the Secretary-General’s “Our Common Agenda” has further reaffirmed the UN commitment to continue and step up its anti-corruption work.

Recognising the adverse impact of corruption on human rights, this Office has identified corruption as an area for enhanced engagement and capacity, including through a dedicated anti-corruption advisor to both strengthen our normative work and support our field presences.

Corruption undermines the ability of States to fulfil their human rights obligation to use the maximum of available resources for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. It is not a “victimless crime”. It harms millions and its worst repercussions are felt by those already left furthest behind. [Studies](https://www.u4.no/publications/correlation-between-corruption-and-inequality.pdf) have shown that increased corruption results in reduced income for the poor. Individuals from vulnerable or marginalized groups, such as minorities, indigenous peoples and irregular migrants suffer [disproportionately from discrimination in public services](https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/anti-corruption/module-7/key-issues/impact-of-corruption-on-specific-human-rights.html) for example, because they are easy targets for corruption, and often unable to afford the costs of a bribe.

Human rights bring the victims into focus. Fighting corruption is fighting against discrimination and against injustice.

Corruption is also profoundly corrosive of social cohesion. It deepens grievances. It drives protests and contributes to tensions and conflict. And it undermines the very foundations of the social contract.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has served as [a catalyst for corruption](https://www.u4.no/topics/covid-19-and-corruption/basics), with negative impacts on the enjoyment of human rights. It contributed to debilitating social protection schemes and health systems. [A survey of 58 countries](https://nemexis.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NMXS-Survey-Covid-19.pdf) found that corruption in healthcare services weakened healthcare delivery, contributing to COVID-19 deaths in every third country surveyed. As the impacts of the pandemic continue to be felt, we are witnessing not just a health crisis, but also increasingly a crisis of governance, a crisis of trust.

Pandemic responses must [respect and protect the human rights](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/EmergencyMeasures_Covid19.pdf) principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, and dignity. The same principles should also empower anti-corruption efforts, ensuring that precious public resources are being spent in a way that no one is left behind. Practices such as [e-procurement, open contracting](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/why-data-is-latin-americas-best-weapon-in-the-fight-against-covid-19-corruption/), and spending dashboards, allow oversight agencies, the media, and the public to detect and deter corruption risks in government contracts and purchases, including those made during emergencies.

To fight corruption, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly need to be guaranteed. An independent judiciary is paramount in this regard, as is a free and independent media and adequate protection of anti-corruption actors, whistle-blowers and other human rights defenders. In short, all that constitutes vibrant and robust civic space.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to join forces to tackle corruption, a moral and ethical imperative, if we are to truly realize the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind.

I wish you fruitful and constructive deliberations.

Thank you very much.