

## **John Githongo - Allard Prize Ceremony Speech - October 1, 2015**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed. I should like to start by thanking the Peter Allard School of Law of the University of British Columbia for the innovation of their Allard Prize for international integrity, Mr. Peter Allard and his family and the International Integrity Committee for making it possible for all of us to be at this auspicious occasion today.

Reading the profiles of the other short-listed candidates - Indonesia Corruption Watch and Mr. Sergei Magnitsky of Russia - and looking at the work they are doing I'm both impressed and humbled and count it a privilege to be counted among such a group. It is such a privilege to receive this honour and more so to share it with Angola's, Mr. Rafael Marques de Morais whose courageous and noble work I have read about. I am particularly pleased at the opportunity being here has provided for us to begin what I hope will be fruitful professional and personal relationships that will benefit the work that each of us do. I thank the Allard team for this acknowledgement of not only my work but that of my wife and the many, many colleagues with whom nothing I have achieved would have been possible.

I have only a few remarks to make, more observations after over 20 years in the anti-corruption field. Allow me if you will to share three of them:

First, we've realised that though well researched and consistent advocacy by groups like Transparency International, Global Integrity, Global Witness and others combined with the media has led to massive global awareness of corruption – which I define as the abuse of vested authority for private gain - the problem itself has grown exponentially in scale, complexity and impunity. I find this deeply ironic. However, the most important realisation has been that corruption fuels not only poverty but far more politically and socially disruptive - inequality. It is also true that in today's

## **John Githongo - Allard Prize Ceremony Speech - October 1, 2015**

globalised world grand corruption, money laundering and the like is done using the infrastructure engineered by groups of lawyers, auditors, accountants and other professionals who can navigate the loopholes in the global matrix of anti-corruption conventions and laws.

The World Economic Forum estimates that the cost of corruption annually last year equalled more than five percent of global GDP US\$2.6 trillion, with over a trillion dollars paid in bribes per year according to the World Bank. At the start of the century the African Union estimated that 25 percent of the GDP of African States is lost to corruption - US\$148 billion at the time.

We've learnt another important lesson: that corruption - the abuse of vested authority for private gain be it personal or corporate - has become part of the DNA of the modern political process. Sometimes even in mature democracies, concentrated financial power in this era of oligarchs can buy influence deepening inequality and discriminating against the already marginalised - usually women and the poor. Indeed, in much of the world anti-corruption agencies created in the 1990s are 20 years behind the embedded networks of the corrupt in this globalised and interconnected world. Those who choose to confront this leviathan by increasing awareness about the depth of the problem and the extent to which it contributes to political, economic and social contradictions in society usually pay a high personal price. An unhealthy impunity attends to corruption, though the rhetoric in its regard has never been higher and development spending on it never been more ostensibly sophisticated. In truth impunity pays well too regularly; the thieves get elected to office too often; and those who pay for them to get elected corporatise themselves such that they are too big to fail, too big to jail, or simply so complex in their structure that they are too time-consuming and expensive for even the most robust prosecutorial institutions to pursue. So we have learnt that to deal with corruption one needs to invest in all the institutions of governance

## John Githongo - Allard Prize Ceremony Speech - October 1, 2015

and the rule of law; in the culture and traditions of a people; in the processes via which power is negotiated and competed for. I should like to argue too that, and I say this cognisant that the esteemed Judge Richard Goldstone is in the room, that the time has come for an International Anti-Corruption Instrument with the multi-jurisdictional capacity like a group of IAEA weapons inspectors to target particularly egregious cases of grand corruption affecting public goods important to all the world. The current FIFA scandal affecting world soccer is instructive here.

Given this, it is heartening that in the recently agreed upon Sustainable Development now poised to replace the Millennium Development Goals, Goal No.16 focuses on **Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, acceptable and inclusive institutions at all levels**. This goal states further that: we shall 'substantially reduce corruption' and 'by 2030 significantly reduce illicit financial flows, strengthen recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime'. This is the most encouraging commitment to fight corruption at the global level in a long time. It is for all of us to make the commitments matter and real.

A third lesson that is still unfolding is that there appears to be a fledgling youthful insurgency underway against ailments such as corruption. The millennial digitised generation of under 30s is at the forefront of this. This is a generation committed to greater transparency, accountability, authenticity in political leadership and public life generally; a generation whose digital skills continue to feed a surge of leaks and whistleblowing in the West that is unprecedented and infectious albeit deeply uncomfortable for states struggling to manage their secrets. This demographic appears exhausted with the situation where a leader's every statement has been tested by an opinion poll and varnished by spin doctors and salesmen with the skill set for selling sweet fizzy drinks; it is

## **John Githongo - Allard Prize Ceremony Speech - October 1, 2015**

weary of the politics of fear; of the sound bite and the focus group. This generation - like the students here at the University of British Columbia - owns hope in the fight against corruption. Their idealism will bring the Sustainable Development Goals to life; their organising online and on the ground will, I pray, bring home to us that ultimately corruption undermines human dignity especially for the poor, the young and women for whom corruption arrives as extortion by the most powerful. In this, we all have cause to be hopeful.

Once again I would like to humbly thank the Allard International Integrity Committee for the honour they have bestowed on me. The recognition and affirmation is an inspiration and tremendous encouragement as I continue on with my work. As we say in Kenya, Asanteni Sana; thank you very much.