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UN anti-corruption convention rendered toothless; Countries roll back progress on global anti-corruption efforts

Doha: A handful of countries are responsible for the failure of a crucial meeting to agree an effective mechanism that would give a global anti-corruption treaty real power, said Christian Aid, Global Witness, Tax Justice Network and Tearfund today.

China, Russia and Egypt are among the governments who have weakened proposals for a peer review mechanism designed to ensure signatory countries to the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) live up to their commitments.

"A huge opportunity to turn rhetoric into action has been lost due to the irresponsible behaviour of an unlikely coalition of blocking countries", said George Boden of Global Witness.

"Corruption is one of the main reasons that countries remain poor, as government revenues disappear into the pockets of corrupt officials, whilst the poorest are denied access to healthcare, education and a decent living," said Laura Webster of Tearfund.

"This fudged agreement begs the question: what do governments have to hide?" said Adele Poskitt from Christian Aid.

The UNCAC includes a package of measures to tackle corrupt practices, including bribery, embezzlement and money laundering. But without a strong peer review mechanism, there is no way to enforce compliance.

This week's meeting was the opportunity to agree that mechanism. But, in the face of opposition from a number of governments, countries have settled on a weak compromise that does not ensure transparency or accountability.

Under the agreed mechanism, review teams will have to seek permission if they want to make a country visit or talk to those outside of government. The participation of civil society is not guaranteed. Even other UNCAC members will not have access to the full findings of the review teams. A weak review mechanism will mean that corruption will continue to blight the lives of people in poverty.

"This represents a significant setback for UNCAC. The failure to agree to a transparent and inclusive review mechanism will result in a huge loss of momentum for global anti-corruption efforts," said Webster.

"Without effective anti-corruption safeguards, the funding urgently needed to tackle development issues, such as climate change, may be siphoned off not reaching those most in need," said Poskitt.

"Shamefully, a handful of countries have rendered UNCAC toothless," said Boden.

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Notes to editors: The countries that oppose a meaningful review mechanism include Algeria, Angola, China, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.