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**Statement of UNDP in Commemoration of the
2015 International Anti-Corruption Day in Lebanon**

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Your Excellency Mr. Ashraf Rifi, Minister of Justice and Chair of the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network,

Distinguished guests,

I am very pleased to welcome you all on behalf of UNDP. Today, we come together to commemorate the **International Anti-Corruption Day**, which is established on the 9th of December, as established by the UN General Assembly in 2003. Since then, millions of people, from almost every country in the world, have been part of related activities, including seminars, media campaigns, art competitions and collective action initiatives. Recognizing the devastating impact of corruption on human development, people from rich and poor nations alike, have seized this occasion to voice their rejection of it and their commitment to act against it.

In 2013, the Government of Lebanon commemorated the International Anti-Corruption Day for the first time, during a milestone seminar that it organized at the Parliament, with the support of UNDP. The seminar produced important recommendations, some of which were implemented, but many are still pending. Earlier on, non-governmental actors in Lebanon have also commemorated this Day and continued to do so more recently. UNDP was privileged to be a partner to many of those initiatives. For example, we were pleased to support the Lebanese Transparency Association in its activity in 2012 and to join the Antonine University in its activities in 2014 and 2015.

Our event today, however, marks a transformation in our approach, as we move towards putting stronger focus on multi-stakeholder engagement and youth empowerment. This structured initiative was started less than a month ago. Should it meet the expectations of our partners, we are prepared to replicate it and scale it up, not only in Lebanon but also in other Arab countries with the support of our regional project on “Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries” (ACIAC).

Over the last few weeks, UNDP has worked with teachers in five leading universities to conduct a series of outreach activities, on the occasion of the “International Anti-Corruption Day”, to engage university students from different disciplines, including law, political science, finance, accounting, business management and even health. The overall aim was to provide a knowledge-based platform that allows the participating students to formulate and communicate their own views on the state of corruption in Lebanon, how they see it impacting them, and what roles do they see for the State and other actors, including themselves, in confronting this serious problem. Many of those young men and women have chosen to be present with us here today, together with their teachers, and also with a distinguished group of leading public officials and civil society representatives who are dedicated to the struggle against corruption, and with whom we are working closely on many fronts of this challenging struggle.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests,

Our event today is not only the culmination of this innovative pilot initiative for youth against corruption; it also falls on a very fitting juncture in time:

First, this is the month that marks the tenth year of the entry into force of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which is the most comprehensive and only global legal instrument against corruption. The UNCAC strongly emphasizes prevention, in addition to the more traditional notion of criminalization, and also outlines key requirements for enhancing international cooperation including the recovery of stolen assets.

Second, this is the year that marks the launch of a new age in the global development discourse with the adoption of Agenda 2030 – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This ambitious transformative agenda comprises seventeen Goals that deal with the different aspects of human development, including Goal 16 which is dedicated to fostering peace, justice and stronger institutions that are effective, transparent and accountable.

On the first front – the UNCAC – Lebanon became a State Party in 2009. In 2011 (also in December), the Government embarked on a coordinated path to promote compliance with the Convention. Since then, it has indeed taken important steps in this regard. Related efforts, however, seem to have slowed down recently, with a few exceptions, mostly led by the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform, next to the ongoing effort in Parliament to introduce key anti-corruption legislative reforms related to illicit enrichment, asset declarations, access to information and whistleblower protection, amongst others. Our hope is to see further progress made on this very important agenda, and we stand ready, as always, to offer our assistance to related efforts.

On the second front – the SDGs – various challenges await Lebanon, especially with the spill-over effects of the Syrian Crisis. While good progress was made on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), between 2000 and 2015, especially on education and health, the country's performance on environment protection, poverty reduction and gender equity fell below expectations. To meet the SDGs, a significant increase in related efforts is required, including a substantial surge in the financial and technical support provided by the international development community; and a stronger focus on enhancing the effectiveness of public institutions, as well as other involved partners from the private sector and civil society. Taking more decisive action against corruption, including strategic preventive measures, will be indispensable in this regard, and ultimately one of the key entry points needed to improve the daily lives of Lebanese women, men and children, as well as the people that live in this country including refugees from the neighboring countries.

Here, I want to refer to one example – the infamous “Garbage Crisis” known to all of you. The difficulties faced in forging a sound and sustainable solution in this regard reveals a deep

need for wider reforms that are not only technical in nature, but also related to democratic governance, aiming to decrease the risks of corruption and mismanagement in public affairs and public funds, and to increase citizen trust in public institutions. Learning from comparative experiences, we know that this will only be achieved with enhanced transparency and accountability, and with greater societal participation in making decisions and monitoring their implementation.

Lebanon, represented by Minister Ashraf Rifi, has made an important pledge in that direction, at the 6th Conference of States Parties the UNCAC, held in Saint Petersburg last month. By agreeing to the pledge of Transparency International, Lebanon became one of ten countries in the world, and the first Arab country, to institutionalize a commitment to transparency and civil society participation in the review mechanism of UNCAC implementation.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests,

The youth is among the biggest victims of corruption. It threatens their future in many ways: it undermines public services, including health and education, on which they depend to properly cross into full adulthood; it disrupts job markets and limits entrepreneurship, leading to greater unemployment; it even threatens their personal security, whether because of a car accident due to bad infrastructure, or because of toxins that evade controls to contaminate the air, the water, and the food; and in some cases, corruption can also be an additional weapon in the arsenal of terrorists, helping them to buy allegiances and radicalize people, especially young people. For all those reasons, and others, corruption can be the trigger for “brain drain” and the loss of talent that could have helped to build the future.

Over the past weeks, we’ve come to learn in more detail how the youth in Lebanon see corruption. The overwhelming majority of the students who have participated in our activities have expressed their strong dissatisfaction with how politicians are dealing with the problem. While some have lost hope, many of them are still keen on seeing change take place, and a few have already started to consider how they can influence the status quo, even if in a small way.

As I give the floor to His Excellency Minister Rifi, I wish to thank all of you for joining us in this event, and look forward to the discussion between the participating students, the experts and the other distinguished guests, in hope that it could be the start of something good – of something new!
