

Canada least corrupt in the Americas: Report

BY PETER O'NEIL, CANWEST NEWS EUROPE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 17, 2009



Much of the talk regarding the 2009 Montreal Municipal Election has centered around corruption at City Hall. Jocelyn Le Hin made his own statement downtown Sunday, November 1, 2009.

Photograph by: Dave Sidaway, THE GAZETTE

Canada is viewed as one of the least corrupt countries in the world and is an "inspiration" for the U.S. and other nations in North and South America, Transparency International said in a report published Tuesday.

But "rampant" corruption exists in numerous countries around the world, including top targets of Canadian development assistance such as Ukraine, Haiti and especially Afghanistan, according to the Berlin-based watchdog.

Afghanistan's ranking in TI's annual Corruption Perceptions Index has slid in each of the last three years, despite countless complaints from the leaders of western countries sacrificing lives and billions in aid to fight the insurgency.

Examples of graft range from "public posts for sale, and justice for a price, to daily bribing for basic services," according to TI.

Canada was ranked eighth globally, in a tie with Australia and the Netherlands, in its index that assesses internal perceptions of corruption in 180 countries.

TI chairwoman Huguette Labelle, a former senior Canadian public servant and once the top bureaucrat at the Canadian International Development Agency, said Canadians shouldn't be

complacent despite the strong performance.

"I think that compared to the vast majority of countries Canada is doing well," Labelle told Canwest News Service.

"I think that we are not immune from corruption. We have had periodic cases, and so we need to be very vigilant wherever there is money being spent, or there is a chance for cronyism, to really make sure our oversight institutions are working."

Labelle said Canada has a particular responsibility to do more to ensure there are adequate police resources to investigate possible bribery activities involving Canadian firms overseas.

In first place was New Zealand while in second last place, just ahead of the failed state of Somalia, was Afghanistan, the largest recipient of Canadian development aid.

There is "rampant" corruption in Afghanistan, which received a score of just 1.3 out of 10. Afghanistan has slid from 172nd place in 2007 (1.8 points out of 10) to 176th (1.5 points) last year.

Labelle said pressure must remain on President Hamid Karzai, to be inaugurated Thursday for his second term after a fraud-plagued election, to take tough measures.

"I think that all eyes are turned on Afghanistan," she said, noting that anti-corruption initiatives must be backed by more than rhetoric.

"This is a long-term affair, it's not something you turn around overnight."

Canada, with a score of 8.7 out of 10, serves "as a benchmark and inspiration for the Americas," TI said in its report.

Canada's score, as high as 9.0 in 2002, slid to 8.4 in 2005 as a result of the Liberal sponsorship scandal. It bounced up to 8.7 in the 2007 TI index, a level it has maintained in the two subsequent TI studies.

The only other G8 country in the top 15 was Germany, tied for 14th place with Ireland.

Of the other G8 countries Japan and the United Kingdom were tied in 17th place, while the U.S., which lags behind Canada in TI surveys largely because of concerns about how money influences the U.S. Congress, was in 19th place with a score of 7.5 out of 10.

The U.S. didn't slide "despite widespread concerns over a lack of government oversight in relation to the financial sector," said TI, which has been pushing Washington to ensure there are strong new financial rules.

"A swift government response to the financial crisis and moves toward regulatory reforms that include

transparency and accountability measures, may play a role in the country's score," it said.

"Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether proposed reforms are far-reaching enough and to what extent they will be implemented."

France was 24th, Italy was tied in 63rd place with Saudi Arabia, and Russia was tied in 146th place with a number of poor countries.

In addition to Afghanistan many of the major Canadian aid recipients were near the bottom of the list, including Haiti (149), Ukraine (146), Bangladesh and Pakistan (both at 139), and Honduras and Mozambique (130).

TI studies public perceptions about corruption, rather than actual corruption, because corrupt countries typically distinguish themselves by not prosecuting crooked government officials or those who try to bribe and intimidate them, according to its website.

Among TI's independent sources, who assess the frequency or size of bribes in government and politics, include analysts from the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House, Global Insight, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum.

© Copyright (c) Canwest News Service