

## **Summary of a Press Briefing to launch United Nations Asset Recovery Initiative on the Occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day**

As part of the activities to commemorate the first International Anti-Corruption Day, UNIS hosted a press briefing to launch the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime's* (UNODC) Asset Recovery Initiative. The press briefing was held during a day-long Journalist Forum on "Media Coverage of Corruption", a UNIS event.

As part of the Asset Recovery Initiative, UNODC will be offering technical assistance to the Governments of Nigeria and Kenya, to help them recover assets lost to corruption. The Executive Director UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, introduced the Initiative. Also attending the press briefing were Ambassador Julius Kiplagat Kandie, Kenya, and Ambassador Biodun Owoseni, Nigeria, both Permanent Representatives to UNOV. The briefing was chaired by Nasra Hassan, Director, UNIS, and Spokesperson, UNODC.

Mr. Costa opened the proceedings by mentioning that 9 December was the first anniversary of the signing conference of the UN Convention against Corruption, held in Mexico. He pointed out that corruption was a global phenomenon, not restricted only to poor or developing countries. He said that asset recovery was a difficult task, and "profound international cooperation" was needed to make it possible. He also pointed to the "positive message" sent by the presence of the Ambassadors of Kenya and Nigeria, saying it was an indicator of what governments could and were willing to do to address the past.

Ambassador Kandie, Kenya, then took the floor and highlighted the various attempts his Government was making towards dealing with corruption. He said that the country had lost up to US\$ four billion due to corrupt officials, and introduced the "seven pillars" Kenya had created to fight the problem. These include legislative reform and procurement legislation. He pointed out that Kenya was the first country to ratify the UN Convention against Corruption in Merida itself – a symbol of his country's political will to fight corruption.

Ambassador Owoseni, Nigeria, then briefed the media on the losses that Nigeria faced due to corruption. He said that it was "an impediment to development, and in fact, it was everywhere". He said that the country's democratically elected government, which came after 15 years of military rule had set a number of measures in place to introduce transparency into their functioning.

The briefing was followed by a lively Q&A session. In response to a question on whether the UNODC thought it had achieved the right balance in offering assistance to both rich and poor countries, Mr. Costa said that by definition, technical assistance was offered to countries who were incapable of doing it alone, and that is why UNODC was working in the developing world.

In response to a question about the magnitude of the task that lay before the Governments of Kenya and Nigeria, Mr. Costa said that the task of asset recovery was "dramatically complicated". "Assets are exported, broken down, some move north, some south. What leaves the country is billions of dollars, and often, only millions are returned," he added. Ambassador Kandie said that his government had identified the location of approximately US\$ one billion in stolen assets, but lacked

the capacity to repatriate it. In this context, he expressed his appreciation for the assistance provided by the Asset Recovery Initiative. Ambassador Owoseni added that the fact that both the giver and the taker in stolen assets were beneficiaries, and that there were many intermediaries in the process made it a very difficult thing to detangle.

The briefing was attended by more than 40 representatives of the media (BBC, Reuters, AP, APA, IPS, IRNA, the Observer, Der Standard, Le Figaro), permanent missions and non-governmental organizations. Reports on the initiative were published among others by AP, APA, the Financial Times, Irish Times and Comtex News network.