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Corruption, Public Accountability, and Governance in Ethiopia: Examining Allegations and Institutional Accountability Involving Demelash Gebremichael, Adanech Abiebie, and Shemelis Abdissa

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Abstract: *Corruption remains an important governance challenge in Ethiopia, particularly in sectors involving public procurement, land administration, infrastructure, public finance, security institutions, and access to government services. This article examines corruption-related concerns and public accountability issues associated with three prominent Ethiopian officials: Federal Police Commissioner General Demelash Gebremichael, Addis Ababa Mayor Adanech Abiebie, and Oromia Regional State President Shemelis Abdissa. The article does not assert that any of the three individuals personally committed corruption unless supported by a competent judicial or investigative finding. Instead, it examines publicly documented allegations, institutional responsibilities, reported investigations, audit findings, and broader governance risks. The evidence shows that Ethiopia's corruption problem cannot be understood solely through individual accusations. It is also associated with institutional weaknesses, discretionary decision-making, insufficient transparency, procurement vulnerabilities, land-related governance problems, weak accountability mechanisms, and the difficulty of separating political, administrative, and security authority. In Addis Ababa, an audit reported substantial expenditures lacking supporting documentation during Mayor Adanech Abiebie's administration. At the federal level, Demelash Gebremichael has held senior intelligence and police positions during a period in which corruption and illicit financial flows have been major government concerns. Regarding Oromia, allegations concerning Shemelis Abdissa circulate in political and advocacy sources, but these claims require independent verification and should not be treated as established facts without corroborating evidence. The article argues that effective anti-corruption reform requires independent investigation, transparent procurement and land-management systems, institutional checks and balances, protection of whistleblowers, judicial independence, public access to information, asset-disclosure mechanisms, and stronger citizen participation.*
Keywords: Ethiopia, corruption, public accountability, governance, Addis Ababa, Oromia, Federal Police, public finance, land governance, anti-corruption

1. Background

Corruption is widely recognized as a governance problem that can undermine economic development, public-service delivery, institutional effectiveness, and public confidence. The World Bank's diagnostic study of Ethiopia examined corruption risks across eight sectors, including health, education, water, justice, construction, land, telecommunications, and mining, illustrating that corruption cannot be understood solely as isolated misconduct by individual officials (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

The Ethiopian legal system has also developed a specific framework for addressing corruption. The Corruption Crimes Proclamation No. 881/2015 was enacted to clarify corruption-related provisions, incorporate relevant offences involving private-sector actors administering public resources, and strengthen Ethiopia's capacity to combat corruption (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015). The Ministry of Justice currently identifies Proclamation No. 881/2015 as an operative anti-corruption law.

The problem is particularly important when public officials occupy positions involving extensive authority over security institutions, municipal resources, land, procurement, infrastructure, investment, or public services. Such positions create substantial institutional responsibilities for transparency, financial management, legal compliance, and accountability, regardless of whether any particular official has personally committed an offence (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The supplied draft therefore appropriately distinguishes between institutional corruption risks and proof of personal criminal responsibility.

Three public officials provide useful cases for examining these institutional dimensions: Demelash Gebremichael, Commissioner General of the Ethiopian Federal Police; Adanech Abiebie, Mayor of Addis Ababa; and Shemelis Abdissa, President of Oromia Regional State. Their positions represent different governance environments—federal law enforcement, municipal administration, and regional government—and therefore provide an opportunity to examine how corruption risks vary according to institutional authority (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

The article does **not** treat allegations against these officials as established facts. Instead, it asks what corruption-related concerns have been publicly documented, what evidence is available, which matters concern institutional weaknesses rather than personal misconduct, and what mechanisms could strengthen accountability in Ethiopia. This distinction is consistent with the evidence

hierarchy proposed in the original draft, which separates political allegations, investigative reporting, official investigation, and judicial determination.

2. Objective of the Study

2.1 General Objective

The general objective of this article is to examine corruption risks, public accountability, institutional governance, and documented corruption-related concerns within selected areas of Ethiopian public administration, using the institutional positions of Demelash Gebremichael, Adanech Abiebie, and Shemelis Abdissa as documentary cases.

2.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the conceptual and institutional dimensions of corruption in Ethiopia;
2. review the legal and institutional framework for corruption prevention and accountability;
3. examine documented governance and accountability issues associated with federal policing and security institutions;
4. analyze public-financial-management and procurement risks within Addis Ababa City Administration;
5. examine land, investment, and public-resource governance risks within regional administration;
6. distinguish allegations from independently documented findings and judicial determinations; and
7. propose institutional mechanisms for strengthening transparency, accountability, and corruption prevention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative documentary research design. Documentary analysis is appropriate when the objective is to examine legislation, institutional reports, audit findings, academic publications, official statements, and publicly available evidence concerning governance and corruption (Bowen, 2009). The present analysis therefore does not claim to establish criminal liability; instead, it examines the quality, nature, and institutional implications of available evidence.

3.2 Sources of Data

The documentary sources included Ethiopian legislation, government and institutional documents, World Bank research, academic publications, audit-related reporting, official statements, and credible media reports. Particular attention was given to sources that could distinguish documented institutional findings from political allegations. The World Bank–Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission diagnostic provides an important national-level foundation because it examined corruption risks across multiple Ethiopian sectors (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

The study also incorporated peer-reviewed research examining actual corruption cases. For example, Gobena, Negussie, and Toggia (2024) analyzed 16 Ethiopian tender and contract corruption cases based on court files in which defendants had been found guilty. Their study therefore provides evidence of legally established corruption cases rather than merely allegations.

3.3 Documentary Analysis

Documents were analyzed thematically according to five principal categories: corruption risks, institutional accountability, public finance, procurement and land governance, and evidence status. Evidence was categorized as either public allegation, investigative reporting, audit/institutional finding, official investigation, or judicial determination. This approach is consistent with documentary-analysis methodology, which emphasizes systematic examination and interpretation of documents within their institutional context (Bowen, 2009).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Because the study discusses identifiable public officials, particular care was taken to avoid presenting unverified allegations as established facts. The article therefore uses cautious language such as “reported,” “alleged,” “documented,” and “requires verification” where appropriate. A corruption allegation should not be equated with criminal responsibility unless supported by competent investigative or judicial processes (United Nations, 2004; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

4. Literature Review

4.1 Conceptualizing Corruption

Corruption is commonly understood as the abuse of entrusted power for private benefit, although its manifestations differ across political and administrative contexts (Transparency International, 2024). It may include bribery, embezzlement, favoritism, conflicts of interest, procurement manipulation, abuse of office, illicit enrichment, and diversion of public resources (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

Corruption should not, however, be conceptualized only as an exchange of money between an official and a private actor. Institutional arrangements, incentives, administrative discretion, weak monitoring, and limited transparency can create environments in which corrupt practices become possible (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The World Bank's Ethiopian diagnostic specifically identified corruption risks associated with procurement, land, construction, and other public-sector activities (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

4.2 Administrative Corruption

Administrative corruption involves the misuse of public authority during the implementation of government decisions. It can occur through manipulation of licenses, permits, recruitment, procurement, land allocation, taxation, or access to public services (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). Administrative corruption is particularly difficult to control when officials exercise substantial discretion without transparent criteria or effective review mechanisms.

4.3 Political and Institutional Corruption

Political corruption concerns the use of political authority or public institutions for private, partisan, or network-based advantage, while institutional corruption concerns organizational rules or practices that enable misconduct or weaken accountability (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). These dimensions demonstrate why anti-corruption programs must strengthen institutions rather than rely exclusively on punishment of individual offenders.

4.4 Procurement Corruption

Public procurement is a particularly important corruption-risk area because it involves large public expenditures and interactions between government institutions and private businesses. Risks can arise during specification design, tendering, evaluation, contract modification, payment certification, inspection, and project completion (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The World Bank's Ethiopian diagnostic specifically documented procurement-risk mechanisms including specifications designed to favor particular firms and other weaknesses in tender processes.

Evidence from Ethiopian court cases provides further support for the importance of procurement controls. Gobena, Negussie, and Toggia (2024) examined 16 tender and contract corruption cases involving defendants who had been convicted. Their findings indicated that officials manipulated bureaucratic rules, regulations, and administrative decisions to obtain financial benefits.

4.5 Land Governance and Corruption

Land governance is another important area of corruption risk because land allocation, valuation, compensation, registration, redevelopment, and investment decisions involve substantial economic value and administrative discretion (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The World Bank's Ethiopian sectoral diagnostic specifically included land among the sectors requiring attention to corruption risks.

Effective land governance therefore requires transparent procedures, accessible records, clear eligibility criteria, independent review, and effective complaint mechanisms (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). These measures are important in both urban and regional settings where land-related decisions can affect households, businesses, investors, and public institutions.

5. Findings

5.1 Demelash Gebremichael and Federal Security Institutions

Demelash Gebremichael has served as Commissioner General of the Ethiopian Federal Police, following his previous service in the National Intelligence and Security Service. Current Ethiopian reporting continues to identify him as Federal Police Commissioner General (EBC, 2026; ENA, 2026).

The institutional importance of this position derives from the Federal Police's responsibility for crime prevention, investigation, public security, and enforcement of federal law. Consequently, accountability in policing requires attention to legality, internal discipline, financial management, procurement, investigative independence, treatment of suspects, and external oversight (ACLED, 2026).

Recent institutional reporting describes Federal Police activities involving transnational crime prevention and law-enforcement modernization. In 2026, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation reported that Commissioner General Demelash discussed institutional reforms and efforts to strengthen the Federal Police's capacity to address complex security threats (EBC, 2026).

Reporting in 2026 also described joint operations involving the Federal Police and the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission in which authorities reported seizures of contraband valued at more than 53 billion birr and investigations involving hundreds of suspects (Addis Fortune, 2026). These figures describe institutional enforcement activity and **should not be interpreted as evidence that the commissioner personally committed corruption**.

The principal accountability question concerning a senior police institution is therefore broader than personal allegations. It concerns whether the organization has effective internal controls, independent investigation procedures, transparent procurement, financial oversight, disciplinary mechanisms, judicial review, and appropriate external supervision (UNODC, 2011). The original draft similarly identifies law compliance, financial accountability, procurement transparency, and independent investigation as key dimensions of police accountability.

5.2 Adanech Abiebie and Addis Ababa City Administration

Adanech Abiebie became Mayor of Addis Ababa in 2021 after serving in several federal and municipal positions, including Minister of Revenue and Customs, Federal Attorney General, and Deputy Mayor of Addis Ababa (Adanech Abiebie, 2026). Current reporting indicates that the Addis Ababa City Council reappointed her as mayor on September 30, 2026 (ENA, 2026).

The mayoral position carries substantial responsibility for urban development, public services, municipal finance, infrastructure, housing, land administration, and procurement. Such functions naturally create significant corruption-control requirements because they involve large public expenditures, contracts, land decisions, and interactions between government and private actors (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

An important documented issue concerns the Addis Ababa City Auditor General's findings reported in 2024. Addis Fortune reported that approximately **41.34 million birr** had been spent without supporting documentation across 31 city institutions, with approximately **18.76 million birr** attributed to the Design and Construction Bureau (Shewaferaw, 2024).

The audit finding is significant from a public-financial-management perspective, but it should not automatically be interpreted as proof that the mayor personally stole or misappropriated those funds. An expenditure lacking supporting documentation can result from weak internal controls, administrative non-compliance, poor record keeping, negligence, or fraudulent conduct; determining which explanation applies requires further investigation (INTOSAI, 2019). The supplied draft correctly distinguishes "undocumented expenditure" from "proven corruption by a particular individual."

This distinction is particularly important in academic research because attribution of individual criminal responsibility requires evidence linking the specific individual to the alleged conduct. Institutional responsibility, managerial responsibility, administrative failure, and criminal responsibility are conceptually and legally distinct categories (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

Recent reporting also documents continued public statements by Mayor Adanech concerning urban administration and governance. The Addis Ababa City Council reappointed her on September 30, 2026, and official reporting described priorities concerning urban development, service delivery, and administrative reform (ENA, 2026).

5.3 Shemelis Abdissa and Oromia Regional Governance

Shemelis Abdissa has served as President of Oromia Regional State, placing him at the head of one of Ethiopia's largest regional administrations. The position involves substantial responsibilities relating to regional public administration, land, investment, infrastructure, economic development, and public services (World Bank, 2012).

The supplied draft identifies various allegations concerning land, business activities, relatives, and government resources associated with Shemelis Abdissa. However, the available sources include politically oriented advocacy material, and such claims cannot by themselves establish personal criminal responsibility. The appropriate academic treatment is therefore to identify them as allegations requiring independent corroboration rather than present them as facts.

Evidence concerning alleged corruption involving a public official should ideally be examined through land-registration documents, procurement records, company ownership information, audited financial statements, court records, official investigations, asset declarations, and credible investigative journalism (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Where these forms of corroboration are absent, the article should refrain from concluding that an individual committed corruption.

The broader governance issue nevertheless remains important. Oromia's regional government controls substantial public resources and has responsibility for land, investment, infrastructure, and public services. These areas require transparent procedures and independent oversight irrespective of allegations concerning any particular officeholder (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

6. Comparative Institutional Analysis

The three cases represent different institutional environments and therefore different corruption-control requirements.

Public office	Institutional sphere	Principal governance risks

Demelash Gebremichael	Federal security and policing	Procurement, financial accountability, investigation, disciplinary oversight and external accountability
Adanech Abiebie	Addis Ababa municipal government	Public finance, procurement, land, construction and urban development
Shemelis Abdissa	Oromia regional government	Land administration, investment, regional contracts and public-resource management

This comparison should **not** be interpreted as evidence that the three individuals committed equivalent forms of corruption. Rather, the cases illustrate how corruption risks are shaped by institutional authority and the type of resources controlled by public institutions (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The supplied draft makes the same analytical distinction between security, municipal, and regional authority.

Federal security institutions require strong safeguards around coercive authority and investigations; municipal governments require particularly strong public-finance, procurement, construction, and land controls; and regional governments require effective oversight of land, investment, public enterprises, and regional expenditures (UNODC, 2011; World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

7. Discussion

The findings indicate that corruption should be analyzed as both an individual and institutional phenomenon. Focusing exclusively on the morality of individual officials can obscure the organizational systems, incentives, discretionary powers, and weaknesses in oversight that make corruption possible (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

First, **institutional weakness** can reduce the probability that corruption is detected and sanctioned. Where internal audit units lack independence, investigators lack resources, or disciplinary processes are ineffective, corruption risks can persist even when anti-corruption laws exist (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

Second, **administrative discretion** is an important risk factor. Decisions involving land, permits, contracts, licenses, procurement, taxation, and public services can create opportunities for rent-seeking when decision criteria are unclear or difficult for citizens to monitor (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

Third, **procurement systems require particular attention**. Evidence from convicted Ethiopian tender and contract cases demonstrates that corrupt actors have manipulated bureaucratic rules and administrative decisions to obtain financial benefits (Gobena, Negussie, & Toggia, 2024). This finding supports the importance of preventive procurement controls rather than relying exclusively on prosecution after losses have occurred.

Fourth, **public financial management and audit follow-up** are critical. The Addis Ababa audit findings reported in 2024 demonstrate why documentation, expenditure controls, reconciliation, internal audit, and follow-up mechanisms matter. The finding of undocumented expenditure should be investigated and corrected through appropriate institutional procedures rather than automatically converted into an accusation against a particular political officeholder (Shewaferaw, 2024).

Fifth, **land governance requires transparency**. Because land decisions involve substantial economic value, systems should provide transparent records of allocation, valuation, compensation, development rights, and transfers. The World Bank's Ethiopian diagnostic identified land as one of the sectors where corruption risks required systematic attention (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

Sixth, **evidence quality matters substantially** in corruption research. A political accusation and a judicial determination are not equivalent forms of evidence. Investigative journalism may provide valuable evidence but may still require corroboration; audit findings identify control weaknesses or irregularities but do not necessarily establish criminal intent; and judicial findings determine legal responsibility according to applicable law (Bowen, 2009; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

8. Evidence and Accountability Framework

A useful analytical framework for future Ethiopian corruption research can distinguish four levels of evidence.

Level 1: Political or public allegation

An accusation made by a politician, activist, opposition organization, advocacy group, or other interested party constitutes a claim requiring verification (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Level 2: Investigative reporting

Investigative journalism may provide documents, interviews, financial information, or other evidence that strengthens a claim, but the information should be evaluated for independence, authenticity, corroboration, and potential bias (Bowen, 2009).

Level 3: Official investigation or audit

An investigation by an anti-corruption agency, police institution, auditor, parliamentary body, or other competent institution represents a more formal evidentiary process. Nevertheless, an investigation or audit finding is not necessarily equivalent to a criminal conviction (INTOSAI, 2019).

Level 4: Judicial determination

A final judicial determination provides the strongest basis for describing legal criminal responsibility because a competent court has evaluated the evidence under applicable legal standards (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

This framework is especially important when studying public officials because unsupported accusations can damage individual reputations while also weakening the quality of public debate. At the same time, excessive deference to officials should not prevent legitimate scrutiny of public expenditure and institutional performance (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

9. Structural Causes of Corruption in Ethiopia

9.1 Institutional weakness

Limited investigative capacity, inadequate internal controls, insufficient staffing, and weak institutional independence can reduce the ability of government organizations to detect and respond to corruption (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

9.2 Excessive administrative discretion

When public officials exercise extensive discretion over land, procurement, licenses, permits, or public services without transparent criteria, corruption opportunities can increase (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

9.3 Weak transparency

Limited public access to procurement information, budgets, contracts, land information, audit reports, and asset declarations can make external monitoring difficult (Transparency International, 2024).

9.4 Political influence

Where political relationships influence administrative, regulatory, law-enforcement, or oversight institutions, accountability can become more difficult to implement independently (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

9.5 Economic incentives

Economic conditions and incentives can influence corruption risks, particularly where officials or private actors perceive substantial benefits from manipulating public resources. However, economic hardship does not itself constitute a justification for corruption (Gobena, Negussie, & Toggia, 2024).

9.6 Limited citizen participation

Citizen participation can strengthen social accountability when citizens have access to government information, complaint mechanisms, monitoring processes, and institutional channels for reporting misconduct (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

10. Consequences of Corruption

Corruption can generate economic consequences by increasing transaction and project costs, reducing fair competition, and diverting public resources from productive investment (World Bank, 2012).

Social consequences can emerge when citizens perceive that access to public services depends on personal connections, informal payments, or political networks. Such perceptions can reduce confidence in public institutions and undermine social trust (Transparency International, 2024).

Corruption can also affect institutional legitimacy. Where citizens believe that laws are selectively enforced or public resources are distributed unfairly, confidence in government institutions can decline (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Development outcomes may also be affected when resources intended for infrastructure, health, education, water, housing, and other public programs are misallocated or used inefficiently (World Bank, 2012).

In the security sector, weak accountability can undermine cooperation between citizens and law-enforcement institutions. Effective policing therefore requires both operational capacity and mechanisms that ensure legality, transparency, and accountability (UNODC, 2011).

11. Recommendations

11.1 Strengthen Independent Auditing

Federal, regional, and municipal audit institutions should receive adequate resources, professional capacity, and operational independence. Audit findings should be publicly accessible where legally appropriate and should be followed by documented corrective actions, investigation where warranted, and institutional monitoring (INTOSAI, 2019).

11.2 Improve Procurement Transparency

Ethiopia should strengthen electronic procurement and publish key procurement information, including tender announcements, eligibility requirements, bidders, winning companies, contract values, contract modifications, implementation progress, and payment information, subject to legitimate confidentiality requirements (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

11.3 Strengthen Land-Administration Transparency

Land-management institutions should improve digital records and provide transparent information concerning allocation, valuation, compensation, development rights, and registration procedures. Independent complaint and review mechanisms should also be strengthened (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

11.4 Strengthen Asset-Declaration and Conflict-of-Interest Systems

Public officials occupying positions with substantial authority over procurement, land, investment, taxation, security, and public finance should be subject to effective asset-declaration and conflict-of-interest systems, accompanied by verification and appropriate sanctions for violations (United Nations, 2004).

11.5 Strengthen Security-Sector Accountability

Federal policing and security institutions should maintain strong internal disciplinary mechanisms while also being subject to appropriate independent civilian, judicial, financial, and parliamentary oversight (UNODC, 2011).

11.6 Establish Stronger Investigation and Referral Mechanisms

Audit findings, procurement irregularities, unexplained expenditures, and credible allegations should be referred to the appropriate competent institution according to established procedures. Investigative processes should be independent, evidence-based, and consistent with due process (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

11.7 Expand Citizen Participation

Citizens should have accessible mechanisms for reporting suspected corruption, accessing public information, monitoring development projects, and submitting complaints without fear of retaliation. Social accountability mechanisms can complement formal government oversight (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

11.8 Improve Digital Governance

Digital procurement, electronic land records, electronic payment systems, online complaint mechanisms, and open government information platforms can create auditable records and reduce opportunities for discretionary manipulation (World Bank & FEACC, 2012).

11.9 Protect Investigative Journalism and Evidence-Based Public Debate

Investigative journalism can contribute to corruption detection, but allegations should be supported by verifiable evidence and should distinguish documented facts from interpretation or political claims (Bowen, 2009). Public debate should therefore encourage scrutiny while maintaining appropriate standards of evidence and presumption of innocence.

11.10 Strengthen Follow-Up on Audit Findings

An audit is most useful when findings lead to corrective action. Government institutions should establish formal follow-up systems indicating which recommendations were accepted, implemented, rejected, or referred for investigation, together with responsible institutions and implementation deadlines (INTOSAI, 2019).

12. Conclusion

Corruption in Ethiopia should be understood as a multidimensional governance challenge involving individual conduct, institutional arrangements, administrative discretion, procurement systems, land governance, public financial management, and accountability institutions (World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The evidence reviewed in this article demonstrates that corruption risks exist across different institutional sectors and require systematic rather than purely individual responses.

The cases of Demelash Gebremichael, Adanech Abiebie, and Shemelis Abdissa illustrate three different institutional contexts—federal security, municipal government, and regional administration. However, the available evidence does not justify treating allegations against the three officials as equivalent or as established criminal responsibility. The appropriate academic approach is to distinguish public allegations from investigative evidence, audit findings, official investigations, and judicial determinations (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2015).

The Addis Ababa audit findings reported in 2024 demonstrate the importance of financial controls and documentation, while research based on convicted Ethiopian procurement cases demonstrates how manipulation of bureaucratic rules can contribute to corruption in government contracting (Shewaferaw, 2024; Gobena, Negussie, & Toggia, 2024). These findings reinforce the need for preventive systems capable of detecting risks before public resources are lost.

Ultimately, effective anti-corruption governance requires independent auditing, transparent procurement, accountable land administration, effective asset-declaration systems, professional investigations, judicial oversight, digital records, citizen participation, and institutional checks and balances (United Nations, 2004; World Bank & FEACC, 2012). The central policy challenge is therefore not simply identifying individuals who may be accused of corruption, but building institutions capable of preventing, detecting, investigating, and sanctioning corruption through transparent and legally grounded processes.

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