



**Embargoed until 12<sup>th</sup> June 2008, 13.30 hrs, Jakarta time (GMT+7)**

## **Power of Asia's Media to Expose Corruption Not Fully Unleashed**

**Jakarta, 12 June 2008** - Strong media can boost anti-corruption efforts in Asia and the Pacific but serious constraints still impede the full power of the press to report on corruption, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported today.

Media represents a key ingredient to keep governments and private businesses honest, UNDP said in its newly launched Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, *Tackling Corruption, Transforming Lives*. Yet media across Asia and the Pacific faces two main constraints – from government censorship that may obscure corruption, and from market pressures to serve the interests of wealthy individuals who also may be corrupt. These can also be compounded by lack of investigative skills, all of which impede human development, particularly for the poor, the Report notes.

“Tackling corruption is not a job for governments alone,” said Omar Noman, Chief of Policies and Programmes, UNDP Regional Centre in Colombo. “The media and individual citizens all need to stay alert, demanding the highest ethical standards and resolving to reject corruption wherever it appears,” he said.

Empowering the media, enacting laws on the right to information and using information technology and e-governance to make governments more transparent can prevent as well as expose corruption across the region, the Report advises.

### **Widespread exposure in a ‘YouTube Era’**

Disclosures on the Internet are becoming more widespread, such as the case of an independent journalist in China who exposed a local official who stole US\$400,000. And in India, the wife of one whistleblower built a website to make his case known to the world, saying, “In the YouTube era, it is harder to kill a man who has a bit of Internet renown.”

However, overall the extent of press freedom in the Asia-Pacific region remains low. An indication can be gathered from the ratings of independent organizations such as Reporters Without Borders, an NGO that compiles an annual index of press freedom based on 50 criteria. The 2007 index rated 169 countries, of which the top 10 were all European; six Asia-Pacific countries ranked among the bottom 10 in the press freedom index.

However, even a free press is not enough to ensure good governance and reduce corruption, the Report cautioned. “What these countries need in addition are clean and efficient systems of justice that will follow up on widely-reported allegations,” says the

Report. Nevertheless it would be wrong to say that media in these countries has been completely ineffective. In many countries with the most open media, including India, Philippines and Indonesia, media coverage has helped to create public pressure for reform, even if this has been slow to materialize. It could also be argued that without a free press, the situation in these countries would have been far worse, according to the Report.

### **Responsible and ethical journalists are crucial**

At the same time, freedom must be balanced with responsibility to preserve the credibility of the media; for example, one survey cited in the Report found that 70 percent of Indonesian journalists in East Java and 97 percent of those in Jakarta were taking payments from their news sources. Establishment of independent media watch groups and press councils is thus critical.

The press is most effective where there is a plurality of media representing diverse views and ownership patterns, and operating in a competitive market. A survey of 28 Asia-Pacific countries found that most had both private- and government-owned media; however, in East Asia and the Pacific roughly one-third of countries reported only government-owned newspapers.

A powerful way to control corruption is to enact progressive laws on the right to information (RTI), such as has been done in India. “Public officials need to be engaged and convinced about the value of right to information – and develop the ability to deal with requests promptly and appropriately,” says Anuradha Rajivan, head of UNDP’s Regional Human Development Report Unit. “At the same time, the media and other parts of civil society must learn how to use right-to-information systems responsibly,” she says.

### **Community media for the poor and marginalized**

Community radio stations or broadcast outlets run by non-profit groups can act as a means for keeping corruption in check, especially in poor or remote areas.

For example, community radio stations in Nepal are raising awareness with the NGO Pro Public through more than 5,500 Good Governance Radio Clubs with 53,000 members. Fem’Link, an NGO in Fiji, broadcasts a regular series of community discussions among women using mobile radio and television equipment that can be carried from village to village; corruption is a recurring theme because it hits women particularly hard. In Papua New Guinea, a hotline allows members of the public to report suspected cases of corruption directly to the media.

The Report advocates policies that enhance media’s potential for exposing corruption aimed at:

- Setting benchmarks for national media – press, radio, TV and the Internet – on characteristics that affect their ability to expose corruption. These could include type of ownership, editorial independence, freedom from censorship and the extent of competition
- Building the media as a democratic institution, establishing legal frameworks to allow the media to play its role as a watch group and safeguarding press independence and freedom

- Building journalism as a profession, raising skill levels and ethical standards and improving working conditions and salaries
- Ensuring people's access to the media.

\* \* \* \* \*

***The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build better lives. UNDP works in 37 countries in Asia-Pacific.***

\* \* \* \* \*

*The UNDP Regional Centre in Colombo (RCC) was established in January 2005 to serve countries of Asia-Pacific. It is a regional hub for development knowledge and expertise, providing policy advisory and capacity development services in Poverty Reduction and HIV and Development, with Gender Equality as a crosscutting concern.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Since 2006, Asia-Pacific Human Development Reports have evolved into a regular series. Reports provide continuing analyses of critical development issues relevant at both the regional and country levels. The Asia-Pacific Human Development Report Series offers the region a forum for furthering dialogues and structuring debates to support a pro-poor agenda.*

\* \* \* \* \*

***For further information, please contact:***

Surekha Subarwal, New Delhi; email: [surekha.subarwal@undp.org](mailto:surekha.subarwal@undp.org); telephone (91 11) 2462 8877 ext. 346; mobile: (91 98) 1015 3924

Nina Doyle, Jakarta, email: [nina.doyle@undp.org](mailto:nina.doyle@undp.org); mobile: 62 812 105 2796

Regi Wahono, Jakarta, email: [regi.wahono@undp.org](mailto:regi.wahono@undp.org); mobile: +62 (0)817 9900712

Cherie Hart, Bangkok; email: [cherie.hart@undp.org](mailto:cherie.hart@undp.org); telephone: (66 2) 288-2133; mobile: (66 81) 918 1564

Rohini Kohli, Colombo; email: [rohini.kohli@undp.org](mailto:rohini.kohli@undp.org); telephone: (94 11) 452-6400

Manisha Mishra, Colombo; email: [manisha.mishra@undp.org](mailto:manisha.mishra@undp.org); telephone: (94 11) 452 6400 ext. 239