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The national crime statistics do not assist in the fight against corruption

The national crime statistics released in parliament today do not provide the information necessary to strengthen the fight against corruption.

Corruption Watch executive director, David Lewis said that it appeared that the crime statistics categorise much of the reporting of corruption as common fraud. However, it is essential to isolate those reports of white collar crime that are in fact corruption. He added that whenever a case of fraud involves the abuse of public resources it should be logged as a case of corruption. Hopefully, this will ultimately lead to an increase in prosecutions under the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Activities Act (PRECCA) which generally carries significantly more severe penalties than do most common law white collar crimes.

“Clearly, correctly identifying corruption in the statistics will better enable the public, the policy makers and the law enforcement authorities to combat it. It will reveal patterns and hotspots of corruption; it will reveal the extent to which corruption is reported; and it will enable the public to assess the relative success or failure of the law enforcement authorities in dealing with the crime of corruption.”

Despite clear evidence of significant and growing levels of corruption, the volume of reports and prosecutions for contraventions of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act remain low. What is particularly disturbing is the failure to enforce Section 34 of the PRECCA. This is the provision in the Act that obliges those in positions of authority to report knowledge or suspicion of corrupt activities to the police.

“Given what is known about the scale of corruption, it is clear that there are many people in positions of power, whether in business or public sector, who are not doing their legal duty by reporting corruption. This may be because they are complicit in corruption or because they are willing to sweep dirt under the carpet. Those in positions of authority who ignore their legally binding duty to report corruption should face the full wrath of the law,’ Lewis said.

Reporting of corruption is essential if the police are to do their work effectively and if the public and policy makers are to be adequately informed. However, if the levels of corruption reports are to improve, the police should address corruption within the force and whistle blowers should be better protected by law.

Corruption Watch has placed the reporting of corruption at the front and centre of its campaign to strengthen public participation in the fight against corruption. The organization has received about 1000 reports of corruption from ordinary members of the public by the end of August. People can report corruption at www.corruptionwatch.org.za and the civil society organization will use the information to campaign for effective strategies to combat corruption and will investigate select cases and hand them over to law authorities.

For more information:
David Lewis
082 576 3748