

With all protocol observed...

Firstly; greetings to all of you gathered here today...

I would like to thank you for affording me the opportunity to address you at this important meeting. We have convened here this evening to critically engage on the testing problem of corruption; a matter that has been a challenge to nations around the world.

Increased levels of corruption are associated with low levels of law enforcement, little or no clarity of rules, no transparency and accountability processes in public actions. Additionally, too much discretion is given to officials, too much centralization and monopoly is given to the officials over public or private goods, low relative wages of officials, as well as the large size of the public sector.

Economic and social reform in developing countries such as Somalia (ranked number 174) and China (ranked number 80) has led to social and institutional disorganization. Huntington (1968: 59) states that corruption according to “impressionistic evidence suggests that its extent correlates reasonably well with rapid social and economic modernization” - this has been accompanied by rapid change in people’s value systems. This rapid change in people’s value systems is considered to be one of the major causes of the widespread official corruption.

I must say though, that it is of absolute importance for us to note that in identifying the root cause of corruption it is necessary for us as public intellectuals, civil society, students and academics to find ways to combat this disorder. The exploitation of one's influence and power in a particular position for self-enrichment has undoubtedly and evidently had a negative effect on the development of our respective nations.

We have been, for far too long, an audience to a barrier that continues to erode the legitimacy of our democracy, particularly as South Africans.

Transparency International is an organization that measures corruption levels in different countries around the world. The data collected yearly by Transparency International is an average of different corruption perception surveys. The index is ranked from 0 to 100 with 0 being the most corrupt and 100 being the least corrupt. South Africa's corruption perception index is 43, placing the country in the 69th position amongst 174 countries.

If you will allow me the liberty of quoting our progressive constitution of 1996 that envisions “a South African society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. Government is to be based on the will of the people; the quality of life of all citizens is to be improved and the potential of each person freed” close quote.

Corruption has robbed a large segment of humanity of their right to homes, food, transport, education, health, clean water, and many other fundamental services. The ills and divides, post 1994, of our society are still visible and play themselves out in various institutions and organizations around South Africa; and are further deteriorated by the existence and perpetuation of corruption.

It is both a simple and obvious fact that the liability of corruption is largely felt by the poor whilst enriching a few.

Imagine yourself for a second being born and raised in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, with little or no hope of ever attaining a secondary education let alone a Rhodes University degree, as a result of a misappropriation of funds among other factors. In an article written by the daily dispatch last year it was discovered that “in the last financial year, the education department allocated R700m to schools to buy their own books. Reports shown to the Daily Dispatch revealed that R75m meant for textbooks was not paid over to suppliers. So far 384 schools from 10 districts, which collectively owe more than R4m to booksellers despite having received money from the department, have been identified.”

Or rather imagine yourself being a mother who is critically ill and arrives at a local hospital only not to be attended too, as result of a shortage in staff and facilities. In an article written by the times it was said that “544 department workers were suspected of being ghost employees because it had been established that they had invalid identity numbers”.

We as civil society need to be concerned about the exercise of any individual's power whether in the public or private sector, and in particular with the abuse of that power which undermines our constitutional values.

More importantly, we as a youth are the leaders and decision makers of tomorrow, however, if we do not pursue a different role and function as young people in society, if we, are devoid of a renaissance in our outlook of leadership, we will inherent this calamity.

Ours is to strengthen accountability systems, either by writing or naming and shaming those who abuse and misuse power, whether it is in this institution, grahamstown or South Africa as a whole. We as the SRC are certainly making a commitment to this corruption watch program and also encourage all students and SRC substructures to partake in this program.

I would like to conclude with the words of...

Jeremy Pope who once said; "Combating corruption is not an end in itself; it is not a blinkered crusade to right all the wrongs of the world. Rather, it is instrumental to the broader goal of more effective, fair and efficient government".

THANK YOU...