

Remarks by

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on
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Fight Against Corruption in the Hemisphere"

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INTRODUCTION

I am very happy to be here today as we continue the challenging work of implementing the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption. As you know, the adoption of the anti-corruption convention was a landmark event in the worldwide movement to control public corruption and ensure that democratic principles and good governance flourish. OGE is proud to have had a role in drafting the convention and to continue to participate in ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities.

Today I would like to speak very briefly about the support that my Office has given to anti-corruption efforts around the globe including the work that we have done with foreign ethics offices.

OGE SUPPORT OF ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS

OGE has worked closely with other U.S. Federal agencies to provide technical assistance in their anti-corruption programs throughout the world. Within this past year, for example, OGE staff have participated in briefings, consultations and seminars sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice in Venezuela, Thailand, and the Republic of Georgia. In recent years, OGE staff have also served on delegations and participated in ethics programs organized by the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, as well as agencies such as the Agency for International Development and the former USIA.

My Office has been actively involved in anti-corruption programs throughout Central and South America. OGE has been represented in ethics programs conducted in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador and El Salvador. And we have hosted visiting delegations at our offices in Washington from nearly every country in Central and South America.

OGE was represented at last year's ABA/CEELI conference on the implementation of the OECD convention that was held in Bruges. OGE has also been actively involved in the work of the OECD's Public Administration Management Committee in improving the management of ethics programs.

OGE has also worked with non-governmental organizations in their anti-corruption activities. This past year, for example, OGE staff participated in an ethics seminar sponsored by Transparency International in Brasilia.

WORK WITH FOREIGN ETHICS OFFICES

OGE has worked with foreign ethics offices in China, Egypt and South Africa in the development of their ethics programs. OGE has had an especially active working relationship with the National Office of Public Ethics in Argentina, an office that was established shortly after the Anti-Corruption Convention was adopted. In May of 1998, OGE entered into a memorandum of understanding with that office to continue the direct interchange of ideas and technical consultations. In March of last year OGE attended the signing ceremony at the promulgation of Argentina's new code of conduct and, in April 1999, OGE participated in an ethics conference in Buenos Aires hosted by the ONEP.

Within this past month, OGE consulted with officials of the new government in Argentina regarding our continued assistance to their ethics program. The leadership of the new anti-corruption office is committed to their cause and focused on matters of ethics. OGE staff spent two days in meetings with the ethics staff discussing electronic financial disclosure systems, gifts, conflicts of interest, standards of conduct and other issues of mutual interest. We have established a solid foundation for continued mutual consultations to assist Argentina in this important undertaking.

IMPLEMENTING PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Finally, I would like to make a few observations on what we have learned thus far about efforts to implement preventive measures such as codes of conduct, financial disclosure and ethics training.

First, codes of conduct should not attempt too much. It is not useful to develop a lengthy code if the result is too cumbersome or too complicated.

Second, codes of conduct must be backed by enforcement, whether administrative or criminal, in order to maintain their credibility and be effective as a preventive measure. Administrative codes especially can only be an effective supplement

to criminal enforcement if they are backed by a system of administrative discipline.

Third, all government officials need to be subject to a uniform code of conduct. There should not be different rules for different categories of employees. Nor should there be exemptions from the code for senior officials. Rather senior officials should have to meet the highest standards of conduct.

Fourth, there should be an institutionalized source of guidance to employees that provides authoritative interpretation of the code of conduct so that employees understand what is expected of them.

Fifth, financial disclosure systems are most effective when they are used prospectively as a preventive measure for identifying and resolving potential conflicts of interest.

Sixth, in order for ethics training to be effective there must be a clear mandate from the very top of the organization. Also there must be a clear strategy for determining who to train, what to train on, and how often training should occur.

CONCLUSION

Certainly enormous strides have been made to establish a legal framework for promoting government integrity. And significant progress has been made thus far in implementing the preventive measures. But this is only the beginning. Obviously much work remains to be done. Progress will not always occur as an uninterrupted journey forward. We can learn from our experiences along the way. But we must never lose sight of our destination.