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Statement by Mr.Rustam Badasyan, Minister of Justice of Armenia

High-Level Conference on “Good Governance and the Fight against Corruption in the Digital Era: Strengthening the Principles of Transparency, Integrity and Accountability”

High-Level Panel

6 July 2020

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Corruption has always been and still is one of the biggest challenges not only for the world economy and the rule of law, but also for the peace and security of our world. The fact that we are all here having our input in the process of strengthening the principles of Integrity, Accountability, and Transparency in the fight against corruption shows that our world is facing a new era, where transparency and support of every individual is at the heart of the global reforms that we are all aiming at.

As our world is facing a whirlwind of changes, when we have to adjust to the reality of giving speeches through online platforms, it is of utmost importance to stress the significance of digital tools and innovative solutions as important locomotives of anti-corruption reforms. The use of digital tools and innovative solutions in the fight against corruption is a step towards ensuring the transparency of the processes that are going on in the surrounding world, be these on an individual or an institutional level.

While talking about combating corruption, it is my immense pleasure to highlight that Armenia is making a significant progress in this regard:

- Essential measures have been undertaken to ensure the institutionalization of the fight against corruption. An independent anti-corruption authority – Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC), that was established in November 2019 is currently operational. The commission has a mandate of regulating the process of declaration, inspecting and analyzing declarations, following the observance of the incompatibility requirements and other restrictions, providing professional consultation and methodological assistance on incompatibility requirements, checking integrity of candidates to judges, Constitutional Court Judges, Members to the High Judicial Council,

prosecutors, other state officials provided by law, assessing the anti-corruption regulatory impact, developing and implementing anti-corruption educational programs. The commission has been provided with an efficient toolkit; it has meaningful access to all state databases including the financial data. CPC has already started the process of checking the integrity of candidates to prosecutors in charge of conducting analyses on Civil forfeiture of illegal assets. This process will be continuous and will also cover all the candidates to judges, Constitutional Court Judges Members to high Judicial Council. The Commission shall, based on the results of the consideration and summarization of the information, draw up an advisory opinion on integrity of the person and submit it to the competent body.

It should be noted that the main competences of the CPC is the declaration system, which is one of the cornerstones of transparency, integrity and accountability. In this regard starting from January 2020, the officials are obliged to submit not only asset and income but also interest declaration. The institute of ad-hoc declaration was introduced which allows the CPC to ask declarations from 3rd persons if there is a grounded suspicion that the assets possessed by the declarant or his or her incomes are the property of the 3rd person. It is worth mentioning that the draft law according to which the obligation of submitting declaration of expenditures as well as actually possessed assets will be introduced has been submitted to Prime-Minister's office.

· One of the major impediments to economic growth and security is the absence of effective toolkit for asset recovery. Therefore, in April 2020 the law on "Civil forfeiture of illegal assets" was adopted, which introduces the mechanism of confiscation of unexplained wealth, provides for efficient procedures and necessary guarantees. The process of the recruitment of prosecutors in charge of conducting analyses on Civil forfeiture of illegal assets has been already launched.

I would like to touch upon the importance of an innovative solution that plays a big role in the fight against corruption. According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On the whistle-blowing system", a whistle-blower may anonymously report information about a corruption incident through the unified electronic platform and the Republic of Armenia guarantees the protection of the whistle-blower by ensuring his or her anonymity. In this sense, it should be mentioned that anonymous whistleblowing is considered as a prerequisite of whistle-blowers' protection. The platform has been operating since May 2019. More than 200 reports have been received, 17 % of which later on became criminal cases.

It should be also highlighted that in order to succeed the fight of corruption shall have institutional basis. From this perspective the standalone laws on Anti-Corruption Committee (law enforcement body) and specialized Anti-Corruption Court have been drafted and in the nearest future will be submitted to the Government.

Dear colleagues,

It is an accepted fact that the best appraisal to the efforts undertaken by the Governments is the trust of the people. In this regard, last year Armenia recorded a relatively major growth in Transparency International Corruption perception index, raising its score from 35 to 42 and ranked 77th compared to the 105th rank in 2018.

To conclude, I would like to once more indicate that we need to be very consistent. Even in case of having the best institutional systems and the strongest mechanisms in place, we will never succeed without changing the mindset of people up to the zero tolerance towards corruption. Besides, we should not forget the final beneficiaries of our fight - the people to whom our efforts should serve, so we should encourage and engage with them in this path for building democratic states and resilient societies.

Thank you!