

Statement by Lord Davidson of Glen Clova QC,
Advocate General for Scotland,

Rome, 21 November 2007

I am very pleased to have the opportunity of representing the United Kingdom at this High Level Conference on the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.

The United Kingdom remains a strong supporter of the Convention and we are of course active participants in the Working Group on Bribery which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Convention. There is no question that the Convention, and the monitoring and evaluation measures that it established, have made a major contribution to the global fight against international corruption. It is vitally important that we maintain momentum in taking forward that agenda, which remains key to reducing the risk of harm to our own companies and institutions, alleviating poverty in developing countries, and supporting the rule of law at home and abroad.

For all those reasons the United Kingdom is absolutely committed to combating international corruption. Last year we put in place an action plan across Government ministries which focussed on investigating and prosecuting bribery overseas; eliminating money laundering and recovering stolen assets; promoting responsible business conduct in developing countries; and supporting international efforts to fight corruption. The action plan is overseen by a senior Cabinet Minister and involves contributions from over 20 of UK Government departments and enforcement agencies.

We have increased our law enforcement capacity, with a dedicated 10-person unit in the City of London Police to investigate foreign bribery allegations, and new staff for the Metropolitan Police Proceeds of Corruption unit, which has seized more than £34 million of allegedly corrupt assets. The Serious Fraud Office is forming a dedicated division to investigate overseas

corruption cases. The SFO is currently investigating 11 cases where there are allegations of transnational bribery, as well as fraud. These include investigations relating to Bosnia, Nigeria, Egypt, Costa Rica, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Romania and the Czech Republic. A decision whether to bring charges is expected later this year in relation to at least one of these cases. A number of other cases are currently being considered by the Serious Fraud Office and the City of London Police for investigation in the vetting process.

Clearly I cannot comment in any detail on these ongoing cases but they provide a clear indication of our commitment to ensure that sufficient law enforcement resources are assigned to this important work.

Of course there is more to do. We have just agreed a further action plan for the coming year. We will fully implement the Third EU Money Laundering Directive by the end of the year. We aim to extend the Serious Fraud Office's powers to compel the production of documents and information at the "vetting stage" so as to cover overseas bribery cases. We have also asked our Law Commission to undertake a thorough and detailed review of our anti-bribery laws. We will fully support that review and facilitate steps to build consensus among stakeholders on the way forward, with a view to legislation. We look forward to providing full support to the OECD's Phase 2 bis review to evaluate the UK's anti-bribery framework. UK experts will participate fully in OECD advisory groups on criminalisation and prevention for the purpose of reviewing the OECD's own anti-bribery instruments.

We also have a programme of promoting responsible business conduct in developing countries, and raising awareness of the risks of international bribery and corruption and the UK legal framework with UK companies operating overseas, front-line UK officials, professional organisations and the judiciary. We have already held a number of awareness-raising seminars and have made presentations across the UK as well as in Argentina, Thailand, China and Ghana.

Finally we are supporting international efforts to fight corruption through the UK's Presidency in 2007-8 of the Financial Action Task Force and through implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption.

So I am glad to reaffirm the UK Government's strong support for the Anti-Bribery Convention, our appreciation for what the OECD and the Convention have already achieved, and our commitment to work closely together with our OECD and other overseas partners in redoubling our efforts in this vitally important area.