

For immediate release

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Bribery Act: All parties rally behind landmark new law to fight corruption

In the final days of business before the General Election, Parliament has passed new anti-bribery legislation, sending an unequivocal message that bribery by British companies will not be tolerated at home or abroad.

Development and anti-corruption agencies including Bond, CAFOD, Global Witness and Tearfund welcome yesterday's Royal Assent of the Bribery Act as an important step in combating bribery by UK companies. 'We know from our work in Africa, Asia and Latin America that it is the poorest and most vulnerable people who suffer the most as a result of bribery,' says Laura Webster, Tearfund Head of Policy. 'The party which forms the next government must show a high-level commitment to use this legislation to stamp out bribery by UK companies.'

The Act brings UK laws up to date by creating a new offence of bribing a foreign public official and a corporate offence for companies that fail to prevent bribery.

'We believe that the UK has an obligation to ensure that companies based here do not contribute to corruption overseas through bribery, or other means,' says Sonya Maldar, Policy Analyst for CAFOD. 'We welcome the Act as part of a commitment by the UK Government to tackling this issue and hope that the new government will enforce the new legislation without delay.'

'Bribery undermines transparency and effective governance, discourages foreign investment, wastes public money and puts essential services at risk,' says George Boden from Global Witness.

The Act will go some way to restoring the UK's international reputation, tarnished by government intervention to prevent the investigation into the BAE Systems - Al Yamamah military contract with Saudi Arabia, and past failure to bring UK laws into line with obligations under the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.

The agencies say it is critical that this legislation is implemented at the earliest opportunity. Non statutory guidance for business is a requirement under the Act, which can be of practical value to companies as they bring their procedures in line with the new law. However, the completion of guidance for companies must not be used to delay enforcement of this overdue piece of legislation.

Ensuring that there are sufficient resources available to enforce the Act, including funding for the Serious Fraud Office and City of London Police to carry out investigations, will be crucial if the new legislation is to have teeth.

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