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Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the 15th Commonwealth Regional Conference of Heads of Anti-Corruption Authorities, delivered by Minister Of Justice And Constitutional Development Mmamoloko Kubayi, Westin Hotel, Cape Town, 8 May 2025

Programme Director,
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Hon Shirley Botchwey,
Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Ms Mmamoloko Kubayi,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Members of the Judiciary,
Heads of Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Agencies,
Representatives of law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth,
Representatives of international bodies,
Representatives of civil society organisations, academia and the legal fraternity,
Members of the diplomatic community,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to address this gathering of heads of anti-corruption agencies from across African Commonwealth countries.

Such gatherings are vital to our shared efforts to end corruption.

The reality is that corruption is a category of crime that is constantly evolving.

It has become far more complex and sophisticated, particularly in the age of Generative AI, deep-fakes, fraudulent websites and other technological tools. Law enforcement agencies therefore need to evolve, adapt and keep up with trends in a rapidly changing terrain. We are all keenly aware that corruption is not purely an issue of criminality.

Corruption is an economic issue. The UN estimates that some 5 percent of the world's GDP is lost to corruption every year. The International Monetary Fund estimates that if all countries were to reduce corruption they could gain an estimated \$1 trillion in lost revenues. Corruption increases the cost of doing business and it discourages investment. Corruption is a social issue. It undermines trust in institutions, in governments, in the rule of law and in democracy itself.

Every year trillions of dollars are lost to corruption, bribery, embezzlement and illicit financial flows. This is money that could be used to fund social development. Corruption holds back progress and dashes opportunity.

Corruption is not a victimless crime. It is not something that happens in dark corners between individuals that has no bearing on the lives of ordinary citizens or businesses. Its effects are widespread, insidious and far-reaching. Global networks of corruption exploit vulnerabilities in the international banking system to launder money that often ends up financing other crimes, including terrorism. For this reason, cross border cooperation is key. Effective international collaboration requires that countries have strong anti-corruption policy frameworks and that they build institutions that have integrity and capability. Domestic laws and practices need to reflect the global standards set out in multilateral agreements. Countries need to place a premium on compliance with international instruments.

This alignment enhances cooperation, promotes consistency and strengthens frameworks for preventing and combating corruption. Over the last few years, South Africa has been working to build a strong, robust institutional framework for combating corruption. An important part of this work has been to build effective networks of cooperation between our institutions and with social partners.

Our Financial Intelligence Centre is one of these institutions. It is mandated to identify the proceeds of crime and works with the private sector and public agencies to combat financial crime through analysis and information-sharing. The work of the Financial Intelligence Centre is testament to the power of collaboration between government and the private sector in combatting corruption. We have established a partnership between government and business to bolster the forensic capabilities of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation within our police service. The fight against corruption must necessarily include all sectors of society, whether it is the banking sector, business, academia and research institutions, community forums and civil society, or the media.

As we build a broad social front against corruption, we need to recognise the value of a free, diverse and independent media. It is often the media that shines a light on acts of corruption that would otherwise not have seen the light of day. As anti-corruption agencies, we need to see the media as partners not as adversaries. South Africa remains committed to strengthening the capacity of its institutions to fight corruption.

The launch by our Special Investigating Unit of an Anti-Corruption and Cyber Academy is a recognition that capable and committed people are the most potent weapon against corruption. The Academy offers training in areas such as cyber forensics, open-source intelligence, cryptocurrency investigations and beneficial ownership. I encourage the heads of the anti-corruption agencies represented at this conference to participate in this project and to share their expertise to enhance our collective capacity to combat corruption and financial crimes.

Winning the war on corruption in Africa necessitates that we deepen our international collaboration. The reality is that not all countries have the same resources and expertise to fight corruption. We therefore need an agile mindset when it comes to joint investigations and sharing of knowledge and expertise. Sharing intelligence and coordinating law enforcement actions across borders increase the chances of successful prosecutions for corruption.

If one country lacks strong anti-corruption capabilities, it is important that other countries, through forums such as these, extend the necessary support. Unless we are able to support each other, we run the risk of some countries becoming sanctuaries for the corrupt and their ill-gotten gains. We therefore commend the Association of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies of Commonwealth Africa for its commitment to sharing expertise, conducting joint investigations and providing mutual legal assistance.

Through the G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group, which is chaired by our Special Investigating Unit, South Africa is seeking to drive global efforts to combat corruption, promote transparency and enhance accountability. Let us work together in pursuit of an Africa free of corruption – an Africa in which there is development, in which economic growth is inclusive and sustainable, and where the potential of every African man, woman and child is realised.

Our progress as a continent depends on our success in curbing – and ultimately ending – the crime of corruption that is perpetrated against the people of Africa.

Working together, I am certain that we will succeed.

I thank you

**ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND CONSTITUTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**