

**Introductory Remarks**  
**Prof. Kader Asmal, MP, Minister of Education,**

chairing the 9<sup>th</sup> International Anti-Corruption Conference discussion on  
"Ethics, Accountability and Good Governance"

This session is about ethics, accountability and good governance. It is about a sound democratic system. Ethics can be defined as a code or standard of good behaviour. This lies at the root of any serious effort to establish, maintain and deepen democracy. It requires behaviour which is acceptable and moral.

Such codes and standards should be observed not only because they happen to be morally good, but because they are the best and most practical arrangements by which to order society. You hardly have to be the most shining example of goodness to seek to abide by these norms. You can just be sensible. A healthy society is built on good sense.

Corruption, maladministration and bad governance have to be given constant attention. This is not only because they undermine a country's economy and stability. They do more: they undermine government in the eyes of the people. They lead to a pervasive cynicism about politics and politicians which is disastrous for democracy. People lose respect for the very institutions that are there to protect and nurture their lives. The shameless triumph. Principles go by the board. Opportunism prevails. The self-enriched rule, with insolence, and the people tolerate it - many remaining silent because their slice is waiting.

The process of strengthening the democratic order requires a major act of political will, and extending adherence to public ethics to all levels of governance. Government has an obligation to create the right climate for this to happen. It must be accountable, transparent, accessible and responsive to the views and complaints of the governed.

It is all about renewal. The President of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki, then Deputy President, put it this way when addressing the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference in November 1998 in Cape Town:

*"To meet the challenge of stemming the tide of corruption we need to march to the tune of a new song, the song of regeneration and rebirth, the song of our renaissance, the song signalling the birth of the 'new public servant.'"*

These proceedings today can be seen as a difficult plenary session. They cover two areas which are relatively easily defined, ethics and accountability, and another that is more abstract, good governance. Let us now hear from our keynote and panel speakers, people of distinction, people held in high esteem internationally. Let us bear in mind the theme of this years conference, 'Global Integrity: 2000 and Beyond'

Let us grapple with these issues.  
*Some questions to ask later:*

- I. Is it best to define rules precisely, or to set general principles only, and leave it to those concerned to interpret and police them?
2. What are reasonable levels for disclosure. In South Africa it is gifts of over R350 in value. But what of a ceiling, a maximum limit?
3. What, precisely, is a conflict of interest? Does it apply to the situation now, or something that could come up? Is there a difference between a conflict of interest and a conflict of loyalty? How does one decide such matters?
4. Are some (eg NGOs and media) presumptuous and over-critical in dealing with alleged government corruption? Do they check their facts properly? Do they give adequate pointers to the alleged wrongdoing, so that they have established at least a *prima fade* case?
5. Should the private sector abide by substantially the same principles of ethical and moral behaviour that we expect of public representatives? Or is there a difference? In principle? In degree?
6. The average member of the public instinctively believes allegations of corruption, however far-flung and wild. How can this, without doing violence to the critical need for containing corruption, be brought more into line with the reality of the situation? What role can the media play in this?
7. Some allegations of corrupt behaviour are clearly frivolous and petty or malicious. How can we best deal with this, without going soft on real corruption?
8. Should there be more publicity, eg on letterheads of the Public Protector, telling people what their rights are when it comes to whistle-blowing and/or complaining about corruption or maladministration?