Proposal for regional cooperation  
to promote governance and control corruption in South Asia  

Submitted to:  
Honourable Sheikh Hasina, MP, Prime Minister of Bangladesh

Following is the full text of a letter submitted on November 5, 2014, by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) to Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh proposing regional cooperation under South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)*

Greetings from Transparency International Bangladesh. We submit the following for your kind consideration on the eve of the forthcoming SAARC Summit to be held in Kathmandu on November 22-27, 2014.

We have noted with deep satisfaction the high level of commitment of your government, and personally of your own, to institutionalize democracy, promote accountable governance and control corruption. We are aware that these have always been prominent in the agenda of the government of Bangladesh, as evidenced by not only your public pronouncements, but also clearly reflected in such policy documents as Perspective Plan and Five Year Plan and election manifesto of 2008 and 2014.

Vision 2021 articulated as Perspective Plan 2010-21 has made good governance the centre-piece of our state policy under your leadership. It explicitly states on page 17 that, the “Government is determined to confront and root out the scourge of corruption from the body politic of Bangladesh”. It further pledges “to strengthen transparency and accountability of all government institutions as integral part of a program of social change to curb corruption”. The 6th Five Year plan also asserts on page 9 that ensuring good governance requires establishing strong institutions, and that without a strong anti-corruption strategy the ability to implement Vision 2021 and the underlying 5 year development plans will be seriously compromised.

Your commitment to address corruption has also been reflected in a number of specific initiatives. Just to mention a few: a) enactment of the Right to Information Act 2009 and efforts to implement it; b) adoption of the Whistleblower Protection Act 2011; c) adoption of the Implementation Plan of the UN Convention against Corruption; d) adoption of the National Integrity Strategy – Commitment for Golden Bengal and specific actions taken to implement it; e) enactment of Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012 and strengthening of Financial Intelligence Unit resulting in accession of Bangladesh to the Egmont Group; f) repatriation of corrupt money from Singapore setting the first such example; and g) introduction of e-procurement and initiatives to introduce information technology in public service delivery as part of your vision of Digital Bangladesh.

We recall that during the 14th Summit of SAARC Heads of State or Government at the initiative of Bangladesh, corruption was for the first time discussed and the Delhi Declaration issued at the end of that summit recognized (para 27) corruption as “an issue of serious concern and (Heads of State or Government) agreed to exchange information on national experience in combating corruption and to effectively address this problem”. This had opened unprecedented opportunities for complementing national efforts by regional cooperation to control the scourge of corruption in South Asia.
As recognized by governments of South Asian countries in greater or lesser degree, corruption continues to undermine efforts towards economic growth, social cohesion, equity, rule of law, justice and above all prospects of speedier, more effective and sustainable alleviation of poverty. We, therefore, urge upon you most respectfully to consider issues related to democratic and accountable governance and corruption control when you meet your South Asian counterparts during the SAARC Summit later this month.

Bangladesh has always played a leading role in international and regional contexts. We firmly believe that Bangladesh has the credibility to once again take a proactive initiative during the forthcoming Kathmandu Summit to propose inclusion of governance as a distinct goal in South Asian regional cooperation agenda and to explore areas of mutually beneficial cooperation in corruption control. We call upon you to specifically propose to:

a) reiterate that corruption is a challenge of highest priority for countries of the region individually and collectively;

b) pledge that corruption must be addressed by multi-dimensional strategic interventions with particular emphasis on challenging impunity without fear or favour;

c) commit to undertake effective regional initiatives to mutually share experiences and to cooperate in controlling corruption, particularly it’s cross border dimensions including illicit flow of corrupt money and resources;

d) make a firm commitment to ensure people’s access to information and strengthen institutions of accountability, particularly those mandated to control corruption; and

e) consistent with article 13 of UN Convention against Corruption, pledge to facilitate and enhance greater engagement of people at large, media and civil society to complement government efforts against corruption.

We submit the above with the understanding that these are fully consistent not only with ongoing regional and international practices and trends in many of which Bangladesh is actively engaged, but also with your personal commitment for corruption control and your passion for the poor and disadvantaged sections of the society who are the worst victims of corruption. We remain available for any further elaboration, if needed.

Signed/Executive Director, TIB.

Copied to: Minister for Foreign Affairs, State Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Secretary, Government of Bangladesh

*A similar appeal jointly signed by executive directors of TI chapters in Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, has been made to respective Heads of State or Government.*