INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW [IJLR – IF SCORE – 7.58]

VOLUME 6 AND ISSUE 9 OF 2026

APIS – 3920 - 0001 *(and)* ISSN - 2583-2344

Published by

Institute of Legal Education

https://iledu.in

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION REGIMES: A STUDY OF UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST CORRUPTION

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BEST CITATION – SHUBHAM KUMAR & DR. DEO NARAYAN SINGH, INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION REGIMES: A STUDY OF UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST CORRUPTION, *INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW (IJLR),* 6 (9) OF 2026, PG. 635-646, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN - 2583-2344. DOI - https://doi.org/10.65393/IJLRV6I969

Abstract

Corruption is a world wide problem that erodes governance, economic progress and human rights. This paper has a critical look at the United Nations Convention against Corruption as a universal tool in fighting corruption. It examines its main pillars, which are the preventive measures, criminalization, international cooperation and recovery of assets. The paper also discusses the implementation issues, the inter-jurisdictional differences and the impact of political will and institutional capacity. Through a doctrinal and comparative method, the article identifies the strong and weak points of UNCAC and proposes reforms to make it effective in combating corruption both at the national and international levels.

Keywords - Corruption; United Nations Convention against Corruption; Asset Recovery; Criminalization Anti-Corruption Law; Financial; Crimes International Law; Governance; Transparency; Preventive Measures; International Cooperation; Rule of Law; Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of corruption is more than just its legal definition; it is intricate and widespread and needs to be characterized in its socio-political and economic context. It is often characterized as misuse of the authority entrusted to it to gain personal benefit, but this definition fails to demonstrate the systematic nature of it. In most societies, corruption is institutionalized in the governance, structure and customs and is usually supported by informal networks, patronage, and ineffective institutional mechanisms.[1128] Governance deficiencies are more or less associated with the continuity of corruption. In situations where there is less accountability and fewer transparency mechanisms, the public officials can use their discretionary powers at will and this opens the possibility of corruption. This is especially clear in developing countries, where corruption is normalized because of institutional weakness and socio-economic inequalities, which are not isolated cases, but structural problems that weaken the work of governmental institutions.[1129]
The economic cost of corruption is extensive . It distorts competition in the market in that it gives unfair advantages to some people or organizations, hence it does not encourage healthy competition and innovation. Corruption makes doing business expensive since in many

[1128] Susan Rose-Ackerman, "Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences and Reform" 45 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).

[1129] Vito Tanzi, "Corruption Around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope and Cures" 45 IMF Staff Papers 559 (1998).

cases, firms have to pay bribes to be licensed, get permits or contract. This not only discourages local entrepreneurship, but also foreign investment, which views corrupt environments as risky and uncertain, this is a major setback to economic growth and sustainable development.[1130]

Moreover, corruption causes misappropriation of government funds. Money that could be spent on basic amenities like health, education, and infrastructure are usually used to make individual benefits. This translates into low service provision and lack of sufficient public facilities, which is skewed against the marginalized and vulnerable populations. Corruption, consequently, increases social inequalities and frustrates the drive towards inclusive development. In terms of human rights, corruption is a significant challenge to the achievement of basic rights. The values of equality and non-discrimination are violated when the right to receive the public services is dependent on the bribes or favors. Judicial corruption may result in miscarriages of justice and law enforcement corruption may destroy the culture of trust in the rule of law. In this way, the problem of corruption is not merely an economic or administrative one but also the breach of fundamental human rights. The United Nations has made major strides in dealing with the issue of corruption in the world due to its international effects.

The enactment of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, a document that offers a complete framework on how to fight corruption both at the national and international levels,[1131] is one of the most significant in this regard, and it further serves as evidence of how crucial effective institutions, transparency, and accountability are in ensuring sustainable development.[1132]

EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION

The emergence of international anti-corruption mechanisms is an expression of a shift towards national regulation to international coordination. At first, corruption was a domestic issue, which was resolved in domestic law. Nonetheless, with the advent of globalization and the growth of global trade, the transnational nature of corruption became apparent, and multilateral solutions are needed.[1133] The regional projects had a background role in the development of international standards. Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (1999) of the Council of Europe established binding requirements on its member states to make corrupt practices illegal.[1134] The African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (2003) highlighted governance reform and development-focused anti-corruption policies.[1135] One key milestone was the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery (1997), which focused on the supply side of corruption by making the bribery of foreign public officials by multinational corporations illegal.[1136]

Although significant, its small membership made it clear that a universal system was required. This gap was bridged when the United Nations adopted the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the first global tool against corruption, which combines prevention, criminalization and international cooperation as an expression of the holistic nature of corruption as a systemic problem.[1137] In this way, the development of anti-corruption frameworks evidences the increased awareness of corruption as an international concern that needs to be harmonized in terms of legal requirements and collaboration tools. UNCAC is

[1130] World Bank, Helping Countries Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank (World Bank, Washington D.C., 1997)
[1131] The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003.
[1132] United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 16 (United Nations, New York, 2015).
[1133] The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003.
[1134] Council of Europe, Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (1999).
[1135] African Union, Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (2003).
[1136] OECD, Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions (1997).
[1137]The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003.

the result of these attempts, but its effectiveness is based on its domestic implementation.

STRUCTURE AND PROVISIONS OF UNCAC

United Nations Convention against Corruption has a holistic approach that incorporates preventive, punitive, and cooperative actions. It does not rely on the same model as its predecessors, but instead, it combats corruption in a multi-layered approach that covers governance reforms and enforcement of the law.[1138] The Convention is divided into important chapters, such as preventive measures, criminalization, international cooperation, asset recovery, and technical assistance.[1139] Preventive measures are designed to promote transparency and accountability in the functioning of the administration, and the provisions of the criminalization of the Convention determine the offences of bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of functions.[1140]

International cooperation is another major focus of UNCAC, offering extradition, mutual legal assistance and joint investigation mechanisms that are important when dealing with transnational corruption, that usually involves two or more jurisdictions.[1141] Another important aspect is asset recovery where the right of the states to recover stolen assets is acknowledged. This is a valuable provision especially to developing countries that incur heavy financial losses as a result of illegal financial flows.[1142] Additionally, UNCAC emphasizes technical support and capacity building, as there are differences in resources between states. It encourages exchange of knowledge and institutional fortification to increase implementation.

In general, UNCAC structure is characterized by balancing flexibility and uniformity, enabling states to customize provisions and still have some standardized provisions. Its success, however, is relying on successful domestic implementation and collaboration with other countries.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES UNDER UNCAC

The UNCAC anti-corruption strategy is based on preventative measures. The Convention focuses on active governance reforms to minimize the possibility of corruption;[1143] these include the creation of independent anti-corruption agencies, open procurement procedures and codes of conducts of the state officials. Transparency in government is a major aspect of prevention. Access to information laws, e-governance programs, and open data systems are some of the mechanisms that improve accountability by making institutions open to scrutiny by the masses.[1144] Public procurement is particularly vulnerable to corruption due to large financial transactions. UNCAC promotes fair competition in bidding, transparency, and external control over the process to guarantee fairness.[1145] Laws of conduct also regulate ethical conduct among government officials and tackle the conflicts of interest. The media and civil society are also important in prevention. They are involved, which enhances transparency and uncovers corrupt practices. UNCAC acknowledges this by urging states to uphold freedom of speech and facilitate citizen participation.[1146]

Therefore, preventive measures by UNCAC signify a change of reactionary enforcement to proactive governance. These measures focus on ensuring that systems are put in place to reduce the chances of corruption by tackling the underlying causes of corruption.

CRIMINALIZATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

UNCAC sets out a whole set of laws against the offences related to corruption. They are bribery of government officials, embezzlement, trade in influence, abuse of functions and illicit

1138 Ibid.
1139 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Legislative Guide for the Implementation of UNCAC 25 (United Nations, New York, 2006).
1140 Ibid., arts. 15–25.
1141 Ibid., arts. 43–50.
1142 Mark Pieth, Recovering Stolen Assets 40 (Peter Lang, Bern, 2008).
1143 The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003, arts. 5 – 14.
1144 Transparency International,Global Corruption Report
1145 The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003, art. 9.
1146 Ibid., art. 13.

enrichment.[1147] The standardization of the definitions helps in international collaboration and minimizes legal inconsistencies. Nevertheless, differences in the domestic legal systems are problematic. Some crimes, including illicit enrichment, might be against the principles of presumption of innocence in some countries.[1148] UNCAC provides flexibility in this by making some of its provisions optional. Proper enforcement is not just a matter of legislation but also institutional capacity. The police, prosecutors, and the judiciary should have the skills and autonomy required to deal with complex financial offenses. corrupt practices in these agencies can spoil the anti-corruption initiatives.[1149]

Focusing expertise and resources can be used to improve enforcement by specialized anti-corruption agencies. But their efficiency is subject to independent action and non-intervention by the political authorities. Imprisonment, fines and confiscation of property are some of the penalties, which help in deterring but should be used on a regular basis. Cooperation and training in the judiciary is also a requirement. More intricate cases of corruption are usually cross-border in nature and a jurisdiction has to work with other jurisdictions.[1150]

Finally, UNCAC offers an effective legal framework but its effectiveness relies on the effectiveness of the enforcement mechanisms and the domestic institutional integrity.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS

The United Nations Convention against Corruption is based on international cooperation since corruption is transnational in nature. Corruption activities usually cut across boundaries of jurisdictions and hence unilateral enforcement cannot work. Thus, UNCAC creates a system of collaboration between states in terms of investigation, prosecution, and courts.[1151] UNCAC has provided an important mechanism known as extradition where states transfer accused persons to be prosecuted. The Convention makes extradition processes easier, as corruption offences are considered extraditable crimes. Mutual legal assistance (MLA) also promotes cross-border cooperation by permitting states to exchange evidence, search and acquire witness testimony.[1152]

The Convention also promotes the sharing of information and joint investigations among the law enforcement agencies. Organizations like INTERPOL are essential in facilitating such endeavors but there are still issues on the ground like variation in law, language and political factors.[1153] Nevertheless, UNCAC contributes to improving international collaboration in the fight against corruption considerably, by offering a shared legal framework. **Successful implementation** demands trust, legal harmonization and institutional capacity across participating states.

ASSET RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

One of the most innovative aspects of the United Nations Convention against Corruption is asset recovery. It acknowledges the entitlement of states to restitution of property obtained through corrupt means and sent overseas.[1154] This is indicative of a move towards restorative justice, which focuses on property taken in countries returning it to victimized countries.

Asset recovery process entails a series of steps which include identification, tracing, freezing, confiscation and repatriation of assets.[1155] Each step involves good legal frameworks and effective international collaboration. But there are difficulties in the interaction of complicated financial systems, offshore banking, and divergent legal regulations. It can be very challenging to establish the unlawful nature of assets and it can also take a lot of research.

[1147] Ibid. art. 15 – 25.
[1148] Susan Rose-Ackerman, Corruption and Government 89 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).
[1149] Ibid.
[1150] The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003, arts. 43- 50.
[1151] Ibid.
[1152] Ibid, art. 44.
[1153] UNODC, International Cooperation under UNCAC (United Nations, Vienna, 2010).
[1154] The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003, arts.51 - 59
[1155] Mark Pieth, Recovering Stolen Assets 78 (Peter Lang, Bern, 2008).

Moreover, the law like due process can delay proceedings and even despite these obstacles, asset recoveries are important to developing nations that incur serious economic losses because of corruption.[1156]

UNCAC also focuses on the international cooperation in recovering assets, where the states must cooperate with each other in the legal proceedings and exchange information, which would ensure that recovered assets can be used in the common good to avoid re-corruption.[1157] Therefore, the recovery of assets under UNCAC is an influential instrument in the fight against corruption, but its success is conditional on the harmonization of laws and the institutional level.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE

The application of the United Nations Convention against Corruption is greatly different in different countries because of the variation in legal systems, resources, and political intentions. Although most of the states have passed laws in accordance with UNCAC, enforcing laws is a problem.[1158]

One of the important compliance monitoring tools is the Implementation Review Mechanism (IRM). It entails peer reviews, self-assessments which allow the states to assess their performance, but its non-binding nature limits its effectiveness because it does not give sanctions to non-compliant states.[1159] One of the main barriers is the issue of capacity constraints especially in developing countries. Inadequate resources, shortage of skills and the ineffectiveness of institutions are the barriers to the implementation and enforcement of anti-corruption practices.[1160] Another important factor is the political will; governments can be unwilling to take action against influential people or organizations that engage in corruption. Civil society and international organizations are significant in enhancing accountability and transparency. Their participation improves supervising and promotes reforms. Finally, UNCAC is a detailed framework that may work only when it is implemented at the national level and its political commitment is long-term.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISM

The United Nations Convention against Corruption has a number of challenges and criticism despite the elaborate structure. One of the key issues is the absence of powerful enforcement mechanisms. In contrast to other international agreements, UNCAC lacks sanctions that can be applied in case of non-compliance.[1161] Differences in domestic legal systems pose challenges to harmonisation of laws and procedures. The disparity in the definitions, standards of evidence, and legal traditions can make it difficult to work together.[1162] The use of self-assessment in the mechanism of review can also result in incomplete or biased evaluation. Corruption on high level is still a problem. Another key challenge is that political elites tend to be able to get away with it, compromising anti-corruption initiatives, and another significant issue is the disparity between the law and practice, where most countries tend to adopt a legal framework without enforcing it.[1163]

In addition, the developing countries are constrained by resource limitations and incompetence in technical expertise to execute UNCAC provisions in totality. Therefore even though UNCAC is a historic tool, it is necessary to deal with these hurdles in order to enhance its capacity to fight corruption in the world.

COMPARATIVE AND CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis offers useful information about the efficacy of the anti-corruption measures implemented in different jurisdictions. Singapore and Hong Kong are commonly referred to as successful examples of

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1156 Ibid.
1157 The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003, art. 55.
1158 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Implementation Review Mechanism Report (United Nations, Vienna,).
1159 Ibid.
1160 The United Nations Convention against Corruption, 2003.
1161 Ibid.
1162 Susan Rose-Ackerman, Corruption and Government, 112 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).
1163 Ibid.

this approach with strong institutions, rigorous enforcement, and political commitment.[1164] These jurisdictions have set up autonomous anti-corruption offices with considerable powers and independence. Open governance structures and strong legal frameworks make them successful.[1165] Conversely, poor institutions, scarcity of resources, and unstable political environments are some of the challenges experienced in many developing countries.

Case studies emphasize context-specific approaches. Anti-corruption measures should be localized considering legal, cultural, and economic aspects. Public involvement, transparency, and accountability become the critical components of effective frameworks. Therefore, comparative analysis emphasizes the fact that as much as UNCAC offers a global framework, its implementation should be tailored to national contexts to achieve effective outcomes.Analysis of the case studies is necessary in order to realize the way in which the United Nations Convention against Corruption functions in reality. Although UNCAC offers a general framework of law, practical examples illustrate its weaknesses and difficulties in implementation.

1. **Singapore**: High Integrity and Strictness of Institution. Singapore is commonly considered as one of the most effective anti-corruption models in the world. The anti-corruption system in the country is mainly implemented by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau that is an independent investigative body that lies directly under the Prime Ministers Office. The weakness of Singapore system is: strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws, swift prosecution, high conviction rates, strong political commitment. The significance of the mutual legal assistance under UNCAC was shown in the recent case of a cross-border asset freeze in which there were suspected bribery proceeds. The Singapore government managed to cooperate with Hong Kong in order to freeze around SGD 735,690 that was in offshore accounts. As indicated in this case, it is a practical application of Article 46 (Mutual Legal Assistance) Article 54-55 (international assistance in confiscation)

2. **Nigeria**- *Sani Abacha Asset Recovery Case*. The most high-profile case involving asset recovery under the UNCAC relates to the case of the former Nigerian dictator, Sani Abacha. Abacha is said to have stolen billions of dollars in the treasury of Nigeria and deposited it into Swiss and offshore bank accounts. International cooperation helped Switzerland to freeze and subsequently repatriate more than US700 million to Nigeria.

As shown in this case, the following have been implemented successfully: Article 51 (recovery of assets is a principle in itself) Article 57 (return and disposal of assets) It is still one of the best illustrations of the success of UNCAC.

3. **Philippines**- Ferdinand Marcos Recovery Case, The Philippines reclaimed over US 1 billion stolen by Ferdinand Marcos regime, which was located in Swiss banks.

This case highlights: long-term legal proceedings, jurisdictional complexity, international barriers to banking secrecy. It also shows how recovery of assets under UNCAC may take a long process and that needs long-term diplomatic and legal collaboration.

4. India- One of the most important corruption-related judicial developments in India has been the case of *Vineet Narain v. Union of India*.[1166] In this case, the Supreme Court highlighted the importance of the independence of investigative bodies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and mandated reforms to ensure that anti-corruption investigations are free from political partiality. The Court noted that corruption in public administration has negative consequences for the rule of law and democratic governance. This was a key decision that helped increase institutional accountability in India's fight against corruption.

[1164] World Bank, Governance Indicators Report (World Bank, 2015).
[1165] Ibid.
[1166] (1998) 1 SCC 226.

Another such case is the State of Maharashtra v. Brijlal Sadasukh Modani,[1167] which held that corruption of public servants is an alarming issue of public trust and administrative integrity. The judiciary underlined that public office is a position of trust and that it is an offence against constitutional morality to place it at the service of private interest.

The Siemens AG Foreign Bribery Case is one of the largest corporate corporate corruption settlements in history at the international level, accused of systematic bribery in various countries to obtain government contracts.[1168] Authorities in the U.S. and Germany conducted investigations leading to fines of more than $1.6 billion. The case illustrates the increasing significance of international collaboration and corporate responsibility in order to eliminate transnational corruption.

5. Brazil- Operation Car Wash sheds light on Brazil's politicians, business leaders and state-owned enterprises and their involvement in widespread corruption and money laundering schemes involving the country's state-owned oil company, Petrobras.[1169] In illustrating the case, it had become clear that corruption could be seen as a systemic problem within political and economic institutions.

One other overseas case of note is the BAE Systems Corruption Investigation, alleging bribery in defence contract deals. That case brought into question the political influence and restrictions on the prosecution of high level corporate corruption.[1170] It also showcased the conflict between national interests and obligations regarding anti-corruption in the light of international law. These case studies show that the fight against corruption is best achieved with judicial independence, institutional transparency, and international cooperation. UNCAC offers a global legal framework, but it is only effective if it is implemented as the law and institutions are willing to take independent and impartial action.

UN DATA ON CORRUPTION AND GLOBAL ENFORCEMENT: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

I. The Scale of Global Corruption: UN and International Data

As revealed by the various United Nations agencies and organizations around the world, the level of corruption worldwide is huge. The United Nations Secretary-General estimates that the cost of corruption worldwide is at least five per cent of the world's gross domestic product, which is US$2.6 trillion. World Bank also estimates that businesses and individuals pay over one trillion USD in bribes annually.[1171] If the same rate of losses from corruption and related illicit financial flows to GDP is maintained in 2025, total projected GDP losses are estimated at up to US$5.75 trillion per year for the world.[1172]

While anti-corruption mechanisms have been established, the problem of corruption is still great and large number of people have been paying bribes to access a public service as noted by the United Nations Development Programme, as much as one in five people in the world have been reported to pay a bribe for accessing a public service.[1173] Furthermore, around US$16.9 billion in corruption proceeds have been frozen, restrained, confiscated or returned to affected countries since the entry into force of UNCAC. The largest number of proceeds of corruption seized, repatriated and confiscated in the U.S. and Switzerland, Singapore and Liechtenstein are among the countries to have returned large amounts of

1167 (2016) 4 SCC 417.
1168 Joseph Warin et al., "The Siemens Foreign Corruption Investigation" 45 Tex. Int'l L.J. 457 (2010).
1169 Matthew M. Taylor, "Brazil's Operation Car Wash and the Fight Against Corruption" 28 Journal of Democracy 157 (2017).
1170 Nicholas Ryder, Financial Crime in the 21st Century p.no. 132 (Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2011).
1171 United Nations Secretary-General, Address to the Security Council on Corruption as a Threat to Peace and Security (United Nations, New York, September 10, 2018), available at: https://press.un.org/en/2018/sc13493.doc.htm (last visited on May 29, 2026).
1172 World Economic Forum, The Global Cost of Corruption, cited in United Nations Secretary-General, Address to the Security Council (September 10, 2018); see also UN News, "Pervasive Corruption Costs $2.6 Trillion," available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1018892 (last visited on May 29, 2026).
1173 United Nations Development Programme, "Celebrating the Progress and Confronting the Challenges of Anti-Corruption" (UNDP Blog, December 2023), available at: https://www.undp.org/blog/celebrating-progress-and-confronting-challenges-anti-corruption (last visited on May 29, 2026).

assets to the countries of origin. Nigeria and Malaysia are the two biggest beneficiaries of repatriated corruption-related assets, recovering over a billion dollars (US$1.2 billion) between 2018 and 2023 related to a large-scale fraud on the sovereign fund in Malaysia.[1174]

The Eleventh Conference of States Parties to UNCAC (COSP11, 2025) further underscored that global tax revenues could benefit from the reduction of corruption by US$1 trillion, or 1.25 per cent of global GDP, and that this could represent a significant boost to global economic growth. The figures highlight the need for robust international governance against corruption.[1175]

II. The Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: A Global Overview

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), compiled annually by Transparency International, continues to be the most popular worldwide indicator of public sector corruption. Countries and territories are rated on the CPI ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The 2024 CPI, published on February 11, 2025, exposed that the world is still plagued with high levels of corruption. The overall global score was 43, which marks the 12th year in a row that it has remained below 50 out of 100 and over two-thirds of countries (122 of 180) were below 50.[1176] The index also confirmed that 148 countries have not improved, or have become more corrupt, in corruption between 2012 and today, and only 32 countries have made a progress in reducing corruption.[1177]

The CPI also makes a strong correlation between governance and corruption. The analysis from Transparency International reveals that those countries that are fully democratic have a CPI of an average of 73, while those that are flawed have an average of 47 and non-democratic regimes score an average of 33.[1178] About 6.8 billion people (85 per cent of the world's population) reside in countries with a CPI score below 50. The distribution highlights the institutional integrity-corruption control linkage.

III. Top-Performing Countries (Least Corrupt)

The 2024 CPI serves as an indicator of the countries that are performing best in the area of transparency and anti-corruption governance, with most of the top countries coming from Northern and Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. The top countries illustrate how strong democratic institutions, judicial independence, freedom of the press and effective public administration are. Their performance offers useful and relevant indicators for the implementation of anti-corruption mechanisms under UNCAC.[1179]

Table 1: Least Corrupt Countries – CPI 2024

Rank	Country	CPI Score (2024)	Region
1	Denmark	90	Northern Europe
2	Finland	88	Northern Europe
3	Singapore	84	Asia-Pacific
4	New Zealand	83	Asia-Pacific
5	Luxembourg	81	Western Europe

[1174]UN News, "How the UN is Promoting a Global Commitment to Fight Corruption" (December 9, 2023), available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144582 (last visited on May 29, 2026).
[1175]Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Eleventh Session (COSP11), "What You Need to Know" (UNODC, 2025), available at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2025/December/cosp11-in-sight_-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-conference-of-the-states-parties-to-the-un-convention-against-corruption.html (last visited on May 29, 2026).
[1176]Transparency International, "2024 Corruption Perceptions Index: Corruption Is Playing a Devastating Role in the Climate Crisis" (February 11, 2025), available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/press/2024-corruption-perceptions-index-corruption-playing-devastating-role-climate-crisis (last visited on May 29, 2026).
[1177]Ibid.
[1178]Transparency International, "CPI 2024: Highlights and Insights" (February 18, 2025), available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2024-highlights-insights-corruption-climate-crisis (last visited on May 29, 2026).
[1179]Supra note 50.

Rank	Country	CPI Score (2024)	Region
6	Norway	81	Northern Europe
7	Switzerland	81	Western Europe
8	Sweden	80	Northern Europe
9	Netherlands	78	Western Europe
10 96	Australia / Iceland / Ireland India	77 38	Various South Asia

***Source:* Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 (February 2025)**

Between 2008 and 2011, Denmark has been on top of the CPI for the seventh year in a row due to continued political commitment, institutional independence and transparency. The spaces between Finland and Singapore and the rest are very narrow, with scores of 88 and 84 respectively. Singapore's continued top-three ranking is particularly noteworthy in the light of implementation of the UNCAC, which shows that good governance can be achieved even in a developing-world setting by having a strong implementation team, rapid prosecution and an independent investigative bureau. New Zealand, Luxembourg, Norway and Switzerland complete the top of the index and are all cases of high accountability culture.[1180]

IV. Bottom-Performing Countries (Most Corrupt)

The 2024 CPI also singles out the countries with the highest levels of corruption and systemic corruption. Low-ranking countries are plagued by armed conflict, weak or deficient institutions and a lack of democracy. The way they are included in the CPI reflects the structural obstacles facing UNCAC to enforce the Convention, especially in fragile States where political will and institutional capacity are lacking.

Table 2: Most Corrupt Countries – CPI 2024

Rank	Country	CPIScore (2024)	Key Challenge
180	South Sudan	8	Kleptocracy, civil conflict
179	Somalia	9	Patronage, institutional collapse
178	Venezuela	10	Authoritarian rule, economic crisis
177	Syria	12	War, patronage networks
175	Equatorial Guinea	13	Oil wealth, elite capture
175	Eritrea	13	Authoritarian governance
175	Libya	13	Rival governments, conflict
175	Yemen	13	War, corruption in conflict
173	Nicaragua	14	Restricted freedoms,

[1180] Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 Full Report (February 2025), available at: https://files.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2024_Report_Eng1.pdf (last visited on May 29, 2026).

Rank	Country	CPIScore (2024)	Key Challenge
			authoritarianism
171	Sudan / North Korea	15	Conflict, state control

***Source:* Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 (February 2025**)

Aid funds and oil revenues are captured by elites, making South Sudan last on Transparency International's list with a score of 8, which represents a kleptocratic system. In Somalia (score: 9) institutional corruption and patronage, as well as bribery and embezzlement, by the political establishment remain widespread. Venezuela (score: 10) suffers from an extended economic and governance crisis which has increased corruption at all levels of the public service. Corruption has flourished in the countries of Syria (score: 12) and Yemen (score: 13) where armed conflict has been ongoing, and where state institutions have served patronage networks instead of citizens.

he inability of competing governments to cooperate is demonstrated by Libya (score: 13), and the power of authoritarian corrupt systems is seen in Equatorial Guinea (score: 13) and Eritrea (score: 13). The list goes on with other countries experiencing a drop in freedoms or anti-corruption measures, such as Nicaragua (14) and Sudan and North Korea (both 15). A common feature among these lowest-ranked jurisdictions is the failure or lack of independent institutions, free media, and judicial accountability – just the institutional conditions UNCAC aims to provide. The Arab States and Sub-Saharan Africa (34) are the lowest scoring regions in 2024, closely followed by Latin America & Caribbean (35).

V. UNCAC Implementation Review: Current Status

As of December 2025, out of 192 States Parties to UNCAC, 83 country reviews have been completed under the Implementation Review Mechanism (IRM). Of the 71 countries which have provided a country report, only 14 countries (16.9 per cent) have published their self-assessment checklist and only 49 countries (59 per cent) have published their country report in their UNODC country profile page. Remarkably, no review has taken place in the six months anticipated in the Terms of Reference of the IRM. The reviews can be done in as little as one or one-and-a-half years, in the case of Liechtenstein, Malaysia and South Africa, and nine years in the case of Bolivia and Honduras. [1181]

This underscores the longstanding disparity between the legal framework designed by UNCAC and the implementation in countries. The non-binding and voluntary nature of the IRM remains a constraint on its effectiveness as a tool to ensure real compliance.[1182]

VI. Emerging Trends and COSP11 Priorities (2025)

The Eleventh Conference of States Parties to UNCAC (COSP11), held in December 2025 under the theme "Shaping Tomorrow's Integrity," raised awareness of the new challenges in the struggle against corruption and the necessity to build greater international cooperation to combat the current sophisticated criminal activities. The Conference highlighted that corruption is becoming closely linked to organised crime, illicit financial flows and the misuse of digital technologies and stressed the need for concerted efforts to develop these areas normatively. The role of civil society actors, inclusion of financial intelligence and the adoption of audit tools based on AI and

1181UNCAC Coalition, "International Anti-Corruption Day 2025" (December 9, 2025), available at: https://uncaccoalition.org/international-anti-corruption-day-2025/ (last visited on May 29, 2026).

1182Ibid.

INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW [IJLR – IF SCORE – 7.58]

VOLUME 6 AND ISSUE 9 OF 2026

APIS – 3920 - 0001 *(and)* ISSN - 2583-2344

Published by

Institute of Legal Education

https://iledu.in

blockchain were highlighted as key priorities for the post-COSP11 period.[1183]

o conclude, the recent UN and international statistics on corruption reinforce the fact of progress made via UNCAC, but also the scale of the task that still lies ahead. The global average CPI of 43, the slow rate of IRM reviews, and the ongoing political enrichment of the political elites illustrate the failure of legal mechanisms – no matter how sophisticated – to be effective absent of sustained political will, institutional independence, and real international cooperation.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The United Nations Convention against Corruption needs to be reinforced by addressing the structural and implementation issues. Among the priorities are strengthening enforcement mechanisms and the effectiveness of the review process.[1184] International cooperation can be achieved through legal harmonization across states and capacity building can be used to overcome resource limitations, and new technologies like blockchain and artificial intelligence can be used to enhance transparency and corruption detection. Integrity culture should also be inculcated through public awareness and education. The involvement of civil society has the potential to enhance accountability and reforms.

Therefore, any anti-corruption interventions of the future require legal, technological, and social strategies to effectively combat corruption.

CONCLUSION

The United Nations convention on corruption is a milestone in the international law as it offers a broad guide in the fight against corruption. It combines preventive, legal, and cooperation efforts that is holistic in addressing corruption. Nevertheless, UNCAC is effective but it is based on its implementation. The weak enforcement, political will and resource constraint are some of the challenges that have been hindering progress, which can only be overcome by strengthening institutions, improving cooperation, and fostering transparency. The United Nations Convention against Corruption is one of the greatest successes in the international anti-corruption law. It is the initial universal convention to cover corruption holistically by preventing, criminalizing, cooperating, and recovering assets. The strongest point of it is its holistic nature. In contrast to previous tools, UNCAC is not just a punitive tool against corruption but an institutionally-focused tool.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of challenges:

weak domestic enforcement, lack of political will, jurisdictional conflicts, banking secrecy, limited technical capacity. The case studies of Singapore, Nigeria, and the Philippines show some clear evidence that UNCAC may be effective, in case the state cooperates in good faith, and institutions act independently. The future of UNCAC is in: stronger international cooperation, technological adaptation, improved compliance mechanisms, increased civil society accountability.

Finally, the battle against corruption is not only a legal but also a political and ethical battle. UNCAC offers the legal framework, although it will not be effective without long-term dedication by states.

The war on corruption is a battle and needs a long-term effort by governments, international institutions and the civil society. UNCAC offers a good background, but constant efforts should be made to fit into the changing challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, a

1183 Transparency International, "2024 Corruption Perceptions Index: Corruption Is Playing a Devastating Role in the Climate Crisis" (February 11, 2025), available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/press/2024-corruption-perceptions-index-corruption-playing-devastating-role-climate-crisis (last visited on May 29, 2026).

1184 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Future of Anti-Corruption Strategies (2020).

comprehensive and practical approach that would be focused on reforms should be adopted.

1. The first recommendation is that enforcement mechanism of UNCAC must be enhanced by taking additional measures of compliance monitoring and review processes. Even though the current peer review mechanism offers good advice, its non-binding approach limits its effectiveness. Hence, it needs a stronger monitoring system with a better accountability criterion.
2. Secondly, domestic capacity building should be put at the forefront. Some of the issues that are encountered in many developing countries include poor institutional frameworks, absence of trained investigators, and poor knowledge of the judiciary to handle complex financial offenses. There should be specialized training programs on judges, prosecutors, police officials, and financial intelligence units to enhance the quality of investigation and prosecution.
3. In addition, more legal harmonization between states is necessary to have good cooperation among states. The dissimilarity in domestic legislation, explanations of corruption crimes, and extradition policies normally poses a hitch in cross-border investigations. Harmonized legal norms and eased mutual legal assistance would greatly enhance collaboration.
4. The other significant suggestion is incorporation of technology in anti-corruption systems. Public procurement can be more transparent and less prone to corruption with the help of blockchain, financial monitoring with artificial intelligence, and asset tracing with digital databases. Governance systems that are driven by technology can also enhance preventive mechanisms to a great extent.
5. In addition, the involvement of civil society and freedom of the press should be encouraged. Whistleblower protection, investigation journalism, and access to information on the part of the population are critical in exposing corruption and accountability. Governments must develop a conducive environment to allow public control and involvement.
6. Lastly, the processes of asset recovery should be streamlined and made more transparent. To achieve restorative justice and societal confidence in the anti-corruption process, it is necessary to faster freeze suspicious assets, enhance international banking collaboration, and use recovered funds to benefit society.