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Govt must implement Procurement Act to check corruption - GII

Accra, March 16, GNA - The Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII) on Wednesday urged government to implement the Public Procurement Act to enable it to subject Ministers and public officials to greater degrees of scrutiny, especially in the award of construction contracts. The GII said since over 70 per cent of corruption was derived from the procurement sector, its credible implementation would help government to make good on its pledge of "zero tolerance for corruption" and promote more accountability and transparency.

Mr Daniel Batidam, Executive Secretary of the GII, a local chapter of Transparency International (TI), said this at the launch of the 2005 Global Corruption Report (GCR). The function also saw the launch of the Minimum Standards for Public Contracting, which sets out the blueprint for transparent public procurement.

Transparency International's GCR, first published in 2001, is an annual overview of the state of corruption worldwide. The Report had in the past focused on various sectors of societal life and governance.

Mr Batidam said government and the private sector should adopt TI's minimum standards for Public Contracting and implement the code of conduct that committed the contracting authority and its employees to a strict anti-corruption policy.

He said the scale of corruption was magnified by the size of the construction sector, estimated globally at some 3,200 billion US dollars per year.

Mr Batidam said this year's report had a special focus on "Corruption in Construction and Post-Conflict Reconstruction" because the amount lost due to bribery in contracting was at least 10 per cent of contract value.

"This puts the figure of lost funds at more than 300 billion US dollars per year worldwide."

Mr Batidam said Ghana's construction industry was, especially prone to corruption at various stages of the construction process. This is manifested in the lack of transparency in the award of contracts, the fierce competition for "make or break" contracts and the opportunity for delays and overruns, among other things.

He quoted TI Chairman, Peter Eigen as saying, "corrupt contracting processes leave developing countries saddled with sub-standard infrastructure and excessive debt".

The report cited the Lesotho Highlands Water Project in which two million dollars was paid in bribe by Acres International and 11 other dam building companies. He also cited the Cologne Incinerator Project in Germany where 13 million dollars was paid in bribes during the construction of a 500 million incinerator.

Mr Batidam said though the 2005 report did not include a country report on Ghana nor cite some of the "monuments of corruption" dotted around the country, it did not mean that Ghana was immune to the problem.

"Shoddy construction works and poor infrastructure management is a visible phenomenon - from schools and classroom blocks through roads and dam construction, to private residencies and KVIPs," he added. He said sub-standard construction projects in Ghana, which were tainted by bribery and corruption, resulted not only in loss of money but injured and killed people, especially when built in disaster-prone areas.

Prof. Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, Chairman of the GII Board, said given the highly international nature of construction corruption, there was the need for enhanced transparency in donor-funded projects to facilitate citizen monitoring.

He called for improved public and civil society vigilance in monitoring of projects as well as making official asset declaration more accessible.

Prof. Gyimah-Boadi said the Assurances Committee of Parliament needed to be strengthened to enable it to monitor promises made by Ministers and Public officials in the performance of their duties.

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