EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan is a country in crisis. The insurgency is gaining ground, and the economy is experiencing its most sustained downturn since the fall of the Taliban, with unemployment reaching highs of 40%.

People are fleeing the country by the hundreds of thousands. Against this background, Afghans are subjected to a government widely seen as corrupt, with administrative graft a daily blight on their lives.

When asked to name the major problems facing the country, respondents listed insecurity, unemployment and corruption, in that order. But corruption is also seen as fueling insecurity, by undermining support for the government and driving citizens towards the Taliban.

More than 70% of respondents said that corruption is now worse than it was two years ago, when the last National Corruption Survey was conducted. More and more people are paying higher amounts of money in bribes: Over the past twelve months Afghans paid more in bribes than the government is expected to generate this year in revenue from taxes, customs tariffs and other sources of income. Corruption also retards investment, making it a significant drag on the economy.

Afghans have seen no improvement with the advent of the National Unity Government; they are discouraged, and convinced that corruption cannot be effectively tackled. This may be at least partially due to the fact that those who should be tasked with fighting or eradicating corruption — the courts, judges, prosecutors and police — are almost universally named as the most corrupt institutions in the country.

The international community also comes in for a share of the blame. Close to half of respondents doubt that the international community wants to fight corruption or supports honest officials. Nearly 40% think the international community itself is corrupt.

Afghans engage in corruption because they see no other way of procuring the services they need. Without a bribe they find it difficult to complete the simplest tasks in a reasonable time frame. Procuring a national identity card, obtaining a driver’s license, or getting a school transcript can all become occasions for corruption. Larger issues, such as court cases, require greater input; the survey shows that those involved in court proceedings pay bribes more than half the time they have to interact with these institutions.

Although they say they want to fight corruption, Afghans have little idea of what concrete measures they can take. Few know where to turn, and are not convinced by the National Unity Government’s expressed commitment to deal with the problem. While the NUG has created new anti-corruption institutions and vowed zero tolerance on the issue, there have been almost no appreciable results, at least none that have filtered down to the popular level. Afghans are almost evenly split on the question of whether the government of President Ashraf Ghani is more or less corrupt than that of his predecessor, Hamid Karzai. Clearly, lofty promises and soothing rhetoric will not persuade Afghans that the government is serious about tackling corruption.

The only institutions that regularly receive high marks on fighting corruption are the Mullahs and the Ulema, which are seen as quite effective. While reality shows that these bodies are not, in fact, able to curb corrupt practices to any great extent, the survey does demonstrate that there is a place where Afghans place their trust. Parliament, Provincial Councils, local commanders and international forces, on the other hand, are viewed with a great deal of suspicion.

The government must act quickly and decisively to address the problem. Reform of the judiciary and the police, along with the creation of a clear, transparent and accountable complaints management system are vital if Afghanistan is to emerge from its present malaise.

2 http://www.tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/unemployment-rate