Providing free unbiased legal advice to victims of public sector corruption on how to seek redress

“When somebody comes into the centre with a complaint, we first have to establish the nature of their grievance in confidence and whether it is a genuine and provable case of corruption - because not everyone understands what constitutes corruption.

“We see all types of people – rich and poor – and if they have a case, we advise on how to proceed with it from a legal point of view and push them to take action. We ourselves have to remain neutral. We follow up on all cases but, sadly, many don’t take action in the end because they are frightened – they fear reprisals and are afraid of the public administrations.”

Kawtar Benchekroun, Legal advisor, Centre d’Assistance Juridique Anti-Corruption, Rabat.

CONTEXT

The United Nations Convention against Corruption was signed by Morocco in 2003. Since the Convention’s ratification in 2007, Morocco has been working on improving its legal framework for the effective implementation of the Convention. The prevalence of corruption within the country’s public and private sector, though, remains relatively high. A worldwide public sector corruption perceptions index in 2013 placed Morocco 91st out of 177 countries surveyed.

As a way of enhancing and restoring confidence in the country’s public and private sector environment, a series of legal measures have been implemented in recent years to make the sectors more transparent and to both prevent and penalise corruption.
One organisation contributing to this endeavour is the Centre d’Assistance Juridique Anti-Corruption (CAJAC), which was set up in 2009 by the Moroccan association for combatting corruption, Transparency Maroc, to provide the general public with free legal advice on how to seek redress if they have been a victim of public sector corruption and to inform them of their rights in such instances. With recent financial support from the EU, the Centre has been able to provide this service, as well as make legislative recommendations in relation to tackling corruption and highlight the issue among the public and media.

OBJECTIVES

- Encourage and increase greater participation of Moroccan citizens in grass-roots efforts to tackle corruption and to establish good governance

IMPACT

- The anti-corruption legal assistance centre, CAJAC (Rabat), registered and advised on 780 complaints by citizens in 2012 and 547 complaints in 2011.
- 52 public administration bodies asked if they could publicise CAJAC’s work by placing flyers and posters within their departments; 14 administrations replied positively to this request by CAJAC and publicity materials were delivered to them.
- In 2012, anti-corruption radio campaigns, run by CAJAC, aired on national and local radio in Arabic, French and Tarifit (an Amazigh language). CAJAC continues to forward corruption complaints to relevant public administrations and to reinforce ties with other interested civil society organisations.

TESTIMONIES

“*Our Centre carries increasing weight with the public - and Moroccans are doing more for themselves when faced with corruption. In spite of our legal expertise, we cannot act as their lawyers, though, nor are we the police. Most of us are volunteers. We do, however, send letters of protest, if the need arises. For example, we wrote to the police authorities protesting against the increasing number of street vendors being forced to pay a ‘ransom fee’ to sell their products. We’ve also raised awareness about corruption through radio spots and posters.*

“In our view, although the legislation to fight corruption is there, more and more young people just accept corruption as a part of their daily life. Why? Because no punitive action is taken against the people who commit it. We need to fight back more.”

Michèle Zirari, Assistant Secretary-General, Transparency Maroc, Rabat

“Our Observatory on corruption looks at the press every day. Corruption scandals are being reported more now than in the past. We publish news highlights and send them to public administration officials and people involved in the fight against corruption. We use them to discuss possible ways of reforming current legislation in this area.”

Fouad Zirari, Editor, Observatoire de la corruption et du développement de la transparence au Maroc, Rabat