

Berlin, 02 August 2018

## Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific

In June 2018, the undersigned eighteen Transparency International (TI) National Chapters in the Asia Pacific region, the Managing Director of TI's International Secretariat, and staff from TI's Asia Pacific regional team participated in the TI Asia Pacific Regional Meeting in Taiwan. At the meeting, TI committed to enhancing efforts and cross-regional action to curb corruption in Asia Pacific by working towards:

- **Making Right to Information a reality.** All citizens in the Asia Pacific region need to be able to exercise their right to access information.
- **Ending harassment and restriction of citizens and civil society.** Effective mechanisms to protect and enable people to stand up to corruption must be in place.
- **Engaging the private sector on business integrity.** In their role as both victims and perpetrators of corruption, private sector actors should play an active part in promoting clean business environments.
- **Strengthening anti-corruption agencies.** While in some countries anti-corruption authorities have demonstrated results, and should be praised for them, their independence and capacity are often challenged by the political environments where they operate.
- **Joining forces with key actors.** We are focusing attention on the role of the youth and women as both victims of corruption and agents of change. More effort should be made to reach out to larger groups of people, civil society networks and others.

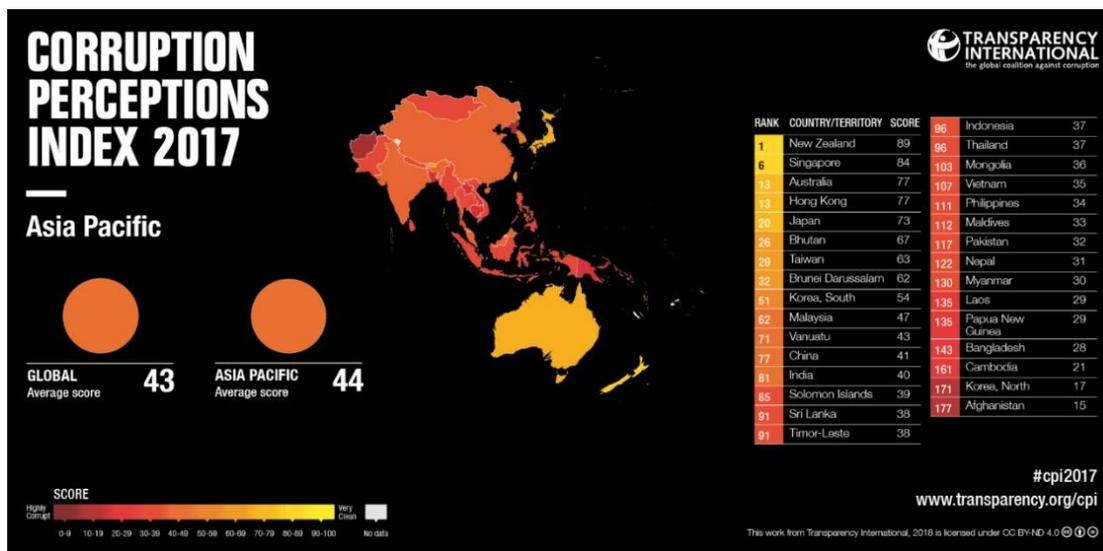
The availability of balanced, credible, far-reaching and accessible media channels is critical to advance our ambitious regional goals.

### Corruption Perceptions in Asia Pacific

The Transparency International [Corruption Perception Index 2017](#) (CPI) ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and

businesspeople, using a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. This year, the index found that more than two-thirds of countries scored below 50.

The CPI suggests a high variance in public sector corruption across the [Asia Pacific region](#). From top scorers like New Zealand and Singapore, to some of the worst scorers like Cambodia, North Korea and Afghanistan. On average, the region scores just 44, reflecting deep-rooted, systemic corruption.



Furthermore, analysis of the CPI results examined the relationship between corruption levels, the protection of journalistic freedoms and engagement of civil society. It found that almost all journalists killed since 2012 were killed in countries with high levels of perceived corruption.

**In this context, Transparency International’s Asia Pacific chapters and the TI Secretariat make this submission to the Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific.**

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and its international services (Radio Australia, Australia Plus TV, and digital and online) have played a crucial role in promoting transparency and good governance in the Asia Pacific region. Coverage of bribery and corruption risks and impacts contribute to economic prosperity and regional security.

The ABC enables the voice of society, by allowing young people, women and small and remote communities, among others, to stay connected and better understand national, regional and global issues.

In particular, we are convinced that media and investigative journalism play a crucial role in bringing allegations of corruption to light and ending impunity. Press freedom is a pre-condition to the reporting of corruption. However, media freedom in the region is coming under more pressure than ever before, and audiences in significant parts of the Papua New Guinea Highlands and Islands, Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have no service.

Beyond Melanesia, there are now ten Pacific Islands Forum countries that no longer receive any FM or shortwave radio from the ABC. Television from the ABC is patchy and has barely any Pacific-focussed programming. The ABC's online, mobile and streaming services are only available to those who can afford internet data or, in limited form, through Facebook, which is offered free by some phone providers.<sup>1</sup>

Vanuatu's Prime Minister Charlot Salwai wrote to a Senate inquiry in 2017, stating the loss of ABC shortwave 'could cost many, many lives in the likelihood of another major natural disaster like Cyclone Pam in 2015'.<sup>2</sup>

Transparency International in the Asia Pacific region strongly supports the re-establishment of a strong and diverse Australian broadcasting presence (shortwave, TV, digital and other) in the region for the following reasons:

- As a public broadcaster, The ABC is better placed than many organisations to take on this task as it has existing services and links with the region.
- The ABC is known for the quality and the balanced view of its reporting. Until recently, the ABC was recognised as the leading broadcaster in the Pacific and arguably the only open and balanced specialist Asia Pacific Broadcaster.
- People in the region need rich debate, impartial reporting and investigative journalism. In the past, the ABC has provided a powerful platform and, through its presence and reporting, empowered journalists in the region to tackle stories that are difficult to tell but important for the public interest.

However, for Australia's Asia Pacific broadcasting to have an impact it needs to reach significant audiences through radio, television and digital services. In particular, technologies need to include shortwave, which cannot be switched off by hostile regimes.

**The signatories of this letter - Transparency International's Asia Pacific chapters and the TI Secretariat - urge the current review by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vanuatuindependent.com/2018/07/09/time-right-step-abc-broadcasting-pacific/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://vanuatuindependent.com/2018/07/09/time-right-step-abc-broadcasting-pacific/>

**Department of Communication and the Arts to re-establish a comprehensive ABC-managed balanced broadcasting and digital media service to the entire Asia Pacific region. This service needs to provide a mix of technologies and rich content including news, current affairs, investigative reporting, documentaries and discussion and debate programs in English and regional languages.**

Thank you.

On behalf of the TI Secretariat:



Patricia Moreira  
Managing Director

TI Chapters in the Asia Pacific region:

*Australia*  
*Bangladesh*  
*Cambodia*  
*Indonesia*  
*Japan*  
*Malaysia*  
*Maldives*  
*Mongolia*  
*Nepal*

*New Zealand*  
*Pakistan*  
*PNG*  
*Solomon Islands*  
*South Korea*  
*Sri Lanka*  
*Taiwan*  
*Vanuatu*  
*Vietnam*