

**7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government on
“Building Trust in Government”**

The background of the page features a large, light gray watermark of the United Nations logo. It consists of a central world map surrounded by a circular border of olive branches, all enclosed within a grid of latitude and longitude lines.

WORKSHOP I

**Restoring Trust in Government
Through Public Sector Innovations**

OPENING REMARKS

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United Nations Headquarters, Vienna, 28-29 June 2007

Excellencies,
Distinguished Panelists, Experts and Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I wish to welcome all of you and thank you for taking part in the **Workshop on Restoring Trust through Public Sector Innovations**. I would also like to welcome our partners, in particular Prof. Rizvi from Harvard University, Dr. Cho from the United Nations Governance Centre, and Dr. Flamment from Formez Training and Study Centre. Dr. Bertucci, Director of the Division for Public Administration and Development Management will join us shortly.

A special greeting also goes to the excellent group of speakers, chairs and rapporteurs who have kindly accepted to share their knowledge and insights with us and who have come from various countries from all around the world, including Albania, Austria, Canada, Chile, France, Kenya, Jordan, Italy, Mauritius, Morocco, Philippines, Spain, The Netherlands, The Republic of Korea, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, just to mention a few.

I would also like to pay once more special tribute to the winners of the 2007 United Nations Public Service Awards who are among us, as well as the members of the Network of Innovators in Governance in the Mediterranean Region. Finally, I would to thank you all of you who have travelled great distances to be with us here today.

As the United Nations Millennium Declaration has highlighted, democracy, including an efficient and effective public administration, is the best way to ensure that the values of freedom, equal opportunities, solidarity, environmental protection, and shared responsibility are respected. Democracy and good governance are a goal in itself because of the values on which they rest, but at the same time, they are also the most critical means to promote development and poverty eradication. An efficient, effective and democratic government is the best guarantor of social justice and an orderly society. Only democratic governments—

because they are participatory, transparent and accountable, respect plural and diverse perspectives, promote gender and social equity, and allow freedom of choice, expression and beliefs—are best suited to advance those goals and ideals.

Having in place a democratic system, however, is not sufficient. Government institutions must have visionary and committed leaders and qualified people to undertake appropriate reforms in the economic and social spheres; be able to mobilize resources and manage expenditure judiciously; and to operate in an accountable and transparent manner, by among other things tapping into the potential of new information technologies. In other words, a democratic government must be effective or it will alienate citizens. The absence of effective government makes citizens cynical and apathetic towards political institutions, erodes their confidence and trust in both the government and its elected officials, and generally leads to a decrease of the government's legitimacy and its authority. The suspicion of government is reflected in declining voter turnout, the difficulties of attracting competent and idealistic people in public service, and in the general inability of the government to deliver services to the citizens.

With low public trust, government officials and politicians have little or no legitimacy to implement political programmes, as well as represent and act on behalf of citizens. A low trust in government institutions can also lead to growth of the informal sector, tax evasion, corruption, crime, and eventually social anomy. Moreover, when trust in public institutions is low, informal institutions can come to be regarded as more authoritative than the State in regulating economic and social affairs turning the State into an empty shell. History has shown that democracies are fragile in nature and need continuous support in order to survive as low legitimacy and apathy can open the doors to repressive regimes. In other words, a democracy is not a “once and for all” conquest but it relies on the vigilance and participation of all citizens at all times.

According to several studies and statistics trust in government has been diminishing in many parts of the world. What is more, the inability of governments to deliver adequate

services, especially in the social sphere, as well as to promote more employment opportunities and better living conditions for all have resulted in a widespread disappointment among the population for the current form of governance up to the point that, according to some studies, the value of democracy per se is being questioned. Most critical of all some democracies have not been able to address the question of equity and social justice effectively; and in the last quarter of a century poverty and lack of opportunities is still a persisting challenge in many countries around the world.

As we have heard over the past 2 days, the question of rebuilding trust in government is of particular relevance to all those who are concerned with strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing government effectiveness. At an intuitive level, we can single out 4 main causes for the loss of confidence in the government.

First, in some countries, government officials are perceived as unethical. Studies have shown that people believe that government officials are not trustworthy because they do not keep their electoral promises and do not act in the interests of society. This involves the issues of leadership and accountability.

Second, governments are perceived as ineffective in delivering services. This is of particular relevance since the legitimacy of a democratic regime is based in great part on the capacity of the State to deliver services that are relevant and of high quality to all sectors of the population in a society.

Third, they are seen as unresponsive since they do not respond to the needs of citizens, especially those of marginalized groups in society.

Fourth, they are wasteful because they are perceived to use resources inefficiently. This is the case of money being spent on building infrastructure which is not useful to the population or which is not completed.

In other words, to rebuild trust in governance, governments should focus on:

- 1) Visionary leadership;
- 2) quality of public services

- 3) access to public services
- 4) participation and engagement of citizens in policy-making processes; and
- 5) effective, efficient and equitable use of resources.

These are the four themes around which the various sessions of this Workshop will revolve during the next two days.

As you know, to overcome the above mentioned challenges, governments around the world are attempting to revitalize their public administration, make it more proactive, more efficient, more accountable, more service-oriented and closer to the people. To accomplish this transformation, governments are introducing innovations in their organizational structure, practices, capacities, and how they mobilize, deploy and utilize the human, material, information, technological and financial resources for service delivery to remote, disadvantaged and challenged people. Looking for and implementing creative solutions to public problems is one of the best ways to increase citizens' trust in their governments.

During the next two days, we will have the opportunity to share among us some of the innovative experiences from around the world that have significantly contributed to rebuilding trust in government. Focusing on innovations for better governance allows us to shift the debate from what the state should do to how it should solve the many challenges it is confronted with, i.e. how to concretely solve complex issues of public concern. Indeed, sharing knowledge about solutions to citizens' daily problems has proven to be an effective means to jump-start a process of constructive thinking and change in government institutions, change that to real needs of the people.

This Workshop, we hope, will offer a good opportunity to discuss key issues regarding innovations and trust, and learn from each other' challenges and opportunities in both designing and implementing innovative reforms. We will be exploring together why and how government should be revitalized through public sector innovations by drawing on the numerous experiences of innovators from around the world.

The ultimate goal of this workshop is to build a shared understanding among all governance actors of why it is important to rebuild trust in government, as well as provide concrete tools on how to do it.

The key policy messages that will emerge from our deliberations will be communicated to the Closing Plenary Session on Friday afternoon.

In designing this workshop, our aim was to provide a platform for discussion of the selected 5 themes in a setting that would provide maximum interaction and participation of all, in the spirit of good governance. Ample time will therefore be devoted to discussion at the round tables among yourselves.

It is our hope that when you leave from here not only have you exchanged significant experiences and thoughts on critical ingredients of rebuilding trust in government, but above all that you will go back to your respective countries with a renewed and sustained drive to innovate in order to make a difference in the daily lives of all citizens.

Thank you.