

# TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (UK)

*the coalition against corruption*



13 June 2007

## **UK-Saudi Al Yamamah Defence Programme Statement by Transparency International (UK)**

TI(UK) has watched with concern the disclosures and allegations in the media over the past few days. It now appears that payments exceeding £1 Billion have been paid to a senior Saudi official in relation to the Al-Yamamah programme; and that the UK Defence Ministry or bodies under its responsibility were involved in covering up such payments. These are very serious allegations, particularly if the arrangements continued after the UK signed the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention in 1997. On one view, it would seem that the UK has been trying to evade its international responsibilities, and that this may have contributed to successive failures by the UK to implement and enforce the Convention.

TI believes that the integrity of the OECD Convention is too important to be undermined by successive and unconfirmed reports of questionable activity by the UK Government and others involved in Al Yamamah; and that it is overdue that the UK Government start energetically to retrieve its reputation, which has suffered badly over the past six months. The OECD and other States party to the Convention are due a full and frank explanation of UK conduct. This may include having to admit to being unable to comply with elements of the Convention. If genuine interests of national security are involved, they have to be explained and justified to the UK's partners, all of whom must be motivated by similar responsible concerns. At the same time, the UK Government must re-double its work to meet the published expectations of the OECD Working Group on Bribery. These include the prompt enactment of laws to give effect to the Convention, an issue highlighted by recent reports. The Home Office decision in March to refer this back to the Law Commission is important; but it must be matched with the resources to enable the Commission to undertake its task quickly, and by a commitment to act on the Commission's recommendations as soon as they have been presented. The Government could go further, in requiring effective monitoring of all remaining aspects of the Al Yamamah programme, and indeed of all defence sector contracts in which official support is sought or given.

The UK Government must recognise that candour is now essential. This does not necessarily involve public disclosure of information of clear vital security (the UK's or anyone else's). But it does mean demonstrating to Parliament, the public and the UK's international partners an adequate explanation of past events and clarity in supporting the welcome efforts promoted by Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, both in the UK and across the world, to tackle the scourge of corruption.

These efforts are doomed to fail so long as unanswered questions swirl around the Al Yamamah programme.

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Transparency International (TI) has been at the forefront of the anti-corruption movement since it was formed in 1993. TI is a non-profit making, independent, non-governmental organisation, dedicated to increasing government accountability and curbing both international and national corruption. TI (UK) is part of a network of 90 national chapters carrying out the TI mission around the world. TI works in a non-confrontational way with governments, companies, development agencies, NGOs and international organisations to seek a consensus to combat corruption. For more information please see [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org) and [www.transparency.org.uk](http://www.transparency.org.uk)

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