



Press Release

'Access to Information' and 'Whistleblower Protection' Legislation:
Impact on the Private Sector

Beirut, October 20, 2009: Under the patronage of His Excellency the Minister of Economy and Commerce, **Mr. Mohammad Al Safadi**, and in collaboration with the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA), the National Network for the Right of Access to Information and the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) organized a conference on "**Access to Information and Whistleblower Protection: Impact on the Private Sector**" at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture – Beirut. His Excellency the Minister of Economy Mohammad Safadi was present at the conference, as well as Mr. Fadi Abboud - President of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists -, Mr. Ghazi Kraytem - President of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon -, Mr. Fadi Saab - Member of the steering committee of the "National Network for the Right of Access to Information-, Mr. Rafik Zantout - Chairman of the Economic Forum -, Mr. Maher Beydoun - Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce - and representatives of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, of the Central Bank, of the United Nations Development Program, and of a variety of economic organizations.

In his opening remark, **Mr. Fadi Saab** - Member of the steering committee in the "National Network for the Right of Access to Information - outlined the establishment of the "National Network for the Right of Access to Information" and the need for its existence due to a lack of transparency and anti-corruption legislation in Lebanon. He thus revealed the important role of the legal right to access to information and whistleblower protection draft laws in the establishment of democracy. The draft laws allow individuals to request and access the official documents they need in their decision-making process. In conclusion, Mr. Saab presented the importance of the draft laws on the private sector, as they would contribute in the creation of a competitive climate by helping firms to compete in making offers and contracts, and to determine a risk-free business strategy.

In his turn, **Mr. Fadi Abboud** - President of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists - advanced that "corruption has become a Lebanese way of thinking and that it became *acceptable* in our culture" and that "the right to access information is nowadays recognized by the international community as one of the basic human rights", and that "it is a necessary right for the protection of all other human rights". Mr. Abboud continued by saying that "this law contributes to the promotion of a culture of transparency and to spreading the sense of responsibility among government officials in the management of public affairs", "It would enable citizens to reach decision-making positions and to participate in the reform of public administrations, in lobbying and supporting the principles of transparency, and in accepting the policies set by the government". Mr. Abboud concluded by stressing that the adoption of these laws will



be reflected positively on the reform environment and on the organizational performance in the private sector; it will also improve Lebanon's image abroad and raise its index of transparency.

Mr. Ghazi Kraytem - President of the "Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Agriculture in Beirut and Mount Lebanon – targeted the importance of the right to access information and defined it as one of the most important pillars of democracy, he said: " We, the representatives of the private sector, have appealed officials on the necessity to implement reforms to the government on all its levels, [...] and we are convinced that the ratification of laws and regulations guaranteeing the right to access information is a basic condition for the implementation of these reforms." In conclusion, Mr. Kraytem said "We, as a civil society, should transport this right to a higher level and include it in the Lebanese constitution in order to develop more democratic political and economic governance."

In the opening remarks, the last words were for His Excellency the Minister of Economy and Commerce, **Mr. Mohammad Al-Safadi**, who confirmed that the Ministry of Economy considers transparency in the government and the fight against corruption as essential steps to build and strengthen confidence between citizens and the government, and this can only be achieved through granting citizens with an effective right to access information. **Minister Safadi** continued saying: "There is no doubt that the law on the right of access information and the law on whistleblower protection will have a positive impact on the economic activity, particularly in the private sector: it will enhance transparency and accountability in the decision-making process, which would reduce corruption, increase government efficiency, and promote investments."

The opening remarks were followed by an intervention for each of **Mr. Badri el Meouchi** - Executive Director of the Lebanese Transparency Association- and **Me. André Nader** - representative of the Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture and member of the Legal Working Group in the Network- who both highlighted the importance of the legal right to access information and whistleblower protection and their impact on the private sector. Later, the legal advisor, **Dr. Georgette Salamé** and the Lawyer **Me. Adel Yammine** introduced and thoroughly explained the draft laws.

The conference was concluded with interventions for the acting Program Director in the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, **Ms. Marilyn Zelin**, who commended the work of the Network and the Legal Working Group and confirmed the readiness of the association to continuously support this initiative. Finally, **Ms. Maya Najm** - Senior Advisor at the American Bar Association – moderated the fruitful discussion that took place between the speakers and the audience.