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## ETHICS AND EDUCATION AS THE PATH FORWARD.

Jay Albanese <sup>32</sup>

Why Corruption is The Largest Problem in The World and How Ethics and Education are The Path Forward.

I'm going to be brief, but I want to hit some important issues that I think are important for the students present here and those online, as well as my colleagues on ways.

I think we ought to be thinking now, in the future, because obviously, we want to spend our time on the biggest problems of the world, right? All of us want to make the world a better place. If you don't, you're in the wrong conference. So, then the question is, well, how do you focus your effort? Where you start and here's one way to look at it. There's a lot of groups around the world that rank the largest problems because we have big problems, resources are limited. How should we prioritize what we focus upon?

Well, the best-known list is the UN Sustainable Development Goals, on the left side of the slide. They're important because they represent the consensus of the world. Of 195 countries in the world, 193 are members of the UN. So, this is the consensus selection of what the Member States of the United Nations, which is the world, see as the biggest problems facing us today. When you look at this list, you say, well, these issues are all over the place. From poverty and hunger, gender, education, climate, justice. How are you supposed to make a difference with these big problems? Well, if you look carefully and do a little homework, I think it can be said that for any of these world's largest problems, they were all either created or made

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worse by the decisions of humans and that many of these decisions resulted from either ignorance, selfishness or corruption. That's how these got to be bigger problems than they started out to be.

So, the common theme among all of these, and that's why the theme of this conference is so important, is that, despite the differences among the substantive focus of all the problems in the world, corruption lies at the core of many of them.

So I have some good news and bad news. First, some good news. When you look globally, higher levels of education are correlated with lower levels of corruption, and there's all kinds of empirical data to show that, as the graphic shows, line shows that education makes a difference. Countries with higher levels of education have more people committed to civil liberties, more aware of international standards and less tolerant of government repression. So, years of schooling is correlated with corruption. Another good news, the content of education is crucial. If you're looking for something to tell your friends, instead of watching the news and say the news are all bad, there are some good news. Here's some good news. Global illiteracy has declined substantially planetwide, just remarkable. Now, unfortunately, this graph covers about 200 years, but I put the line in the graph to show post World War Two with the advent of the UN and a globalized effort to improve global problems. Dramatic drop in the number of people who cannot read or write. Obviously, if you cannot read or write, your ability to affect your life and your community and interact with the world declines. So, this is sort of a key indicator. This are good news. One more slide of good news. The percent of the population globally, that have no formal education has correspondingly also dropped. We have more people going to school planetwide than at any point in human history. So, more people are getting education. More people are able to read and write and thereby exercise control over their individual circumstances.

There are some reasons to be happy, but there is a problem. Now the problem is corruption. When we look at corruption trends here over the last 20 some odd years on these graphs from Transparency International. They find, this is their quote, "A continued failure

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to significantly control corruption is contributing to a crisis in democracy around the world. The data shows, despite some progress, most countries are failing to make serious inroads against corruption". So, what are we to make of this? Literacy is better planetwide, schooling is better, planetwide, corruption is worse. How do we make a difference given that sort of thing? Well, first, of course, corruption is not some vague notion. Some of the previous speakers have talked about this. I will not spend time on it. This is fascinating empirical studies. But if you look at the behaviors that constitute corruption, it is a small number of behaviors. Normally it's under 10. The study I've cited here looked at hundreds of corruption cases. There're really only eight kinds of behaviors that were actually talking about.

So, when you say, oh, corruption is such a global behemoth of a concept, well, no, not really. We didn't drill down really, a limited number of behaviors that constitute corruption. The question is why aren't we making better progress against corruption? Education is getting better but corruption is not. What are we doing wrong? Well, as the slide says, most education, when we look at the curriculum, focuses on the usual things, history, math, science, language. There's much less emphasis, or there's no emphasis on how to evaluate facts to make decisions, which of course is the subject matter of ethics and civic life. History, math, science, language is reporting things. These are skill building things. These are raising levels of competence, very important, but your ability to make decisions, principal decisions is looking forward and not enough of that is part of the educational process in most places. That's because all the facts you know about history, math, science, language, or anything else do not help you make the decision moving forward, right? So, this is an extremely important thing. Too much education looks backward. Not enough looks forward. I have a quote there from Aristotle, but too often it's like one of my favorite quotes: "we're behaving like patients who listen tentatively to their doctor but do none of the things that they're asked to do".

The question becomes, what is it about the content of education that might be able to improve its relationship with corruption

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around the world? What I argue with here in this diagram, I'm arguing that, well, we need more people making ethical decisions moving forward. Every day, you're presented with choices. You decide to go to class. You decide to brush your teeth. You decide to open the door for the person behind you, and all the way through workplace decisions, how you treat others. This is the basics for ethics, right? Ethics begins with etiquette and works its way up. So how do we get more people to create an ethical disposition? Where people have an ethical principal outlook and see their obligation toward others. If you can do that, then that could directly impact corruption, because people are more resistant to making unethical decisions, more resistance slamming the door in the face of the person behind you, more resistant to not caring about people in need around you, more resistant to doing the selfish thing, instead doing the selfless thing. With ethical education, you're less tolerant for corrupt behavior on the part of others and that's very important for informed electorate, informed citizens, to be intolerant of corruption by those in positions of authority. Then, when you do that, then people are starting to do just acts and you improve measures of justice, because there are less people engaging in self-seeking behaviour.

Just a couple other things here. We have made a number of notable instances of progress, especially over the last 20 years. As that law talked persuasively about some of the global initiatives. UN Convention Against Corruption, Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, OECD, the World Bank, OSCE, these are all international organizations pushing things in the right direction. When you look at them, many of them unless they work on structural reforms to reduce opportunities for corruption, structural reforms like changing laws, changing procedures, changing administrative regulations, enhancing oversight, all these kinds of things are extremely important, but what they don't address is what about people who are motivated to just go after their own self-interest? What about people who don't care If building a new school that I pocket 100,000 euros on the side I'm in it for. The point is structural reforms make it more difficult to engage in public or

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private misbehavior, but it doesn't take away the motivation from people who are acting corruptly.

But if you add to our education and training process what people need to do, what are ethical principles? Most people don't even know what they are. How to make ethical choices in difficult circumstances? How do you give a principal response in a difficult circumstance? A boss asks you to do something that doesn't appear to be legally. What do you do? Those are important issues that everybody faces anyway.

Then you will get to ethical decisions. So structural reform is important, but it isn't enough. You need behavioral change as well. The UNODC education for justice, which Marco led for several years at the UN, has developed some fabulous course materials for the primary, secondary and university level education around the world. These are all important steps. Of course, one of the modules is on ethics and integrity, another one is on anti-corruption. My point is structural reform is important, ethics, education and training as important. So, where does this get us? Well, we started with talking about the world's largest problems. We can identify them. Then, you say, well, I'm interested in climate change, but I don't know anything about natural science or science or meteorology. Well, if you're going to be interested in climate change, for example, maybe it's time to take a few courses in those areas. But more important, the issue is why hasn't there been better global action or even local action against it? And if that's a topic that interests you, that's when you look at how our decisions made what, what are people doing locally and nationally, internationally, to address the problem? The point here is at the bottom.

If you want to make a difference in the world, you have to address the largest problems, and my take away point is corruption is the one thing that all of the largest problems in the world have in common. So, if we go after corruption, we can impact all of these other problems.

In my last slide, you see on the left side, the summary of the listing of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Arguably, it's as good as any of the largest problems facing the planet today. And if

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you go up that arrow from the left to the right, more than structural changes needed to reduce corruption, because you're not addressing people motivated to be corrupt through structural change. You need to do something else. You need to address the issue of corrupt people who find their way around laws and regulations and processes. How do we do reduce the number of corrupt people, self-interested people who care about personal interest and not public interest?

Ethics education and training is a way to do this and it is remarkable. I teach ethics, among other classes, very heavily scenario based. But once you learn principles of decision making and give people scenario after scenario of how do you make a decision in difficult circumstances, people start thinking forward and they start recognizing ethical decisions when they present themselves, and they tend to be more thoughtful and act less in self-interest and more in the interest of others. Civil society, of course, as well as states, but NGO's, FBO's academia, the private sector can all be sources for this change in the workplace, in the schools and elsewhere.

So, my take away is: if we're going to make a change in the world, let's focus on the largest problems, and I'm arguing that corruption is the largest problem in the world.

Thank you very much.

### **(Resumo em português)**

Por que motivo é a corrupção um dos maiores problemas do mundo e a ética e a educação o melhor caminho para a erradicar?

A observação empírica permite constatar que os mais educados são menos corruptos. Todavia, a ética desempenha igualmente papel fundamental na avaliação dos comportamentos corruptivos, sendo área a ter também especialmente em conta.

Quando se olha o problema de forma global, constata-se que níveis mais altos de educação estão correlacionados com níveis mais baixos de corrupção, havendo muitos dados a mostrar que a educação faz a diferença. Países com níveis de educação mais eleva-



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dos têm mais pessoas comprometidas com as liberdades civis, mais conscientes dos padrões internacionais e menos tolerantes com a corrupção governativa. Os anos de escolaridade estão, portanto, correlacionados, mas também o conteúdo da educação é crucial.

O analfabetismo global diminuiu substancialmente em todo o planeta, o que é simplesmente notável. A percentagem da população mundial que não tem educação formal também caiu. Temos mais pessoas na escola em todo o planeta do que em qualquer outro momento da história da humanidade. Mais pessoas são capazes de ler e escrever e, assim, de exercer controlo sobre as suas circunstâncias individuais.

Contudo a corrupção à escala mundial está pior. Porquê? Quando olhamos para os *curricula* escolares, constata-se que a maior parte das matérias ensinadas concentra-se usualmente na história, matemática, ciências, linguagem. Mas há muito menos ênfase, ou não há mesmo ênfase nenhuma, na avaliação dos factos quando a tomada de decisões se mostra necessária, o que, obviamente, é assunto da ética e da vida cívica. História, matemática, ciências, linguagem incidem sobre dados. Trata-se de conhecimento de capacitação. Esse conhecimento eleva os níveis de competência, o que é importante, mas a capacidade de tomar decisões, em particular as principais decisões, não faz parte do processo educacional na maioria das escolas.

Precisamos de mais pessoas tomando decisões éticas no futuro. Todos os dias, somos postos perante a necessidade de fazer escolhas e as decisões acabam por depender de um fundamento ético, que pode não ocorrer. Com educação ética, é-se menos tolerante com o comportamento corrupto por parte dos que ocupam cargos de autoridade. As pessoas habituem-se a praticar atos justos e melhora-se a justiça porque há menos pessoas a adotar comportamentos meramente egoístas.

Mas, se adicionar ao processo de educação, o treino sobre o que as pessoas devem fazer na tomada de decisão, onde se situam os princípios éticos? A maioria das pessoas nem sabe do que se trata. Como fazer escolhas éticas em circunstâncias difíceis? Como se dá uma resposta numa circunstância difícil? Um chefe pede para se



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fazer algo que não parece legal. O que se faz? São questões importantes que muitos enfrentam em algum momento. É aí que entram as decisões éticas.

Em suma, a reforma estrutural é importante, mas não é suficiente. Também é necessária uma mudança comportamental. A educação para a justiça do UNODC, que Marco liderou por vários anos na ONU, desenvolveu valiosos módulos de curso para a educação primária, secundária e universitária, utilizáveis em qualquer parte do mundo. Um é sobre ética e integridade, outro é sobre anticorrupção. São passos importantes.

Concluindo. Se a reforma estrutural é importante, o acento na educação e treino ético não o é menos. Só assim se conseguirão resultados significativos e duradouros