

# Suharto, Marcos and Mobutu head corruption table with \$50bn scams

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Releasing a list of the top 10 most corrupt politicians of the past two decades, headed by the former Indonesian dictator, Transparency International warned that the scale of political corruption was undermining hopes for prosperity in the developing world and damaging the global economy.

No country is immune from corruption, the report says, citing the lax controls over political financing in Greece, the close connection between companies and the Bush administration and the unchallenged power of Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, over his country's media.

But the most egregious examples of wholesale looting have occurred in the developing world, TI said, depriving the desperately poor of vital state resources.

"The abuse of political power for private gain deprives the most needy of vital public services, creating a level of despair that breeds conflict and violence," said Peter Eigen, TI's chairman.

Most of the names on the list were protected by western governments who turned a blind eye to their criminal activities in exchange for support during the cold war.

Suharto, regarded as a bulwark against communism in Asia, stole as much as \$35bn from his impoverished country during his three decades in power, before being deposed in 1998 in a popular uprising that was triggered by the Asian economic crisis.

He was charged with looting up to \$500m from the state through various charities controlled by his family, but the judges ruled that he was too ill to stand trial.

Marcos, whose wife's 3,000-piece shoe collection became a byword for the corrupt excesses of his regime, was backed by successive US administrations.

Efforts to track down the estimated \$10bn he embezzled during his 20 years in power were frustrated by years of strict banking secrecy laws in Switzerland. In August last year, 14 years after his death, the Swiss courts finally authorised the release of \$657m to the Philippines' authorities.

Mobutu cleverly used the threat of an invasion from the then Marxist government of Angola to quieten concerns in the west about his increasingly blatant looting from one of the most resource-rich countries in Africa. Washington leaned on the International Monetary Fund to continue lending, despite the doubts of IMF officials.

By the time he was overthrown in 1997, Mobutu had stolen almost half of the \$12bn in aid money that Zaire - now the Democratic Republic of Congo - received from the IMF during his 32-year reign, leaving his country saddled with a crippling debt.

Western multinationals must take responsibility for allowing corruption to flourish, TI says. "The corporate sector has a vital role to play in ending the abuse of power," the report says.

Bribery of local officials by western business is still widespread, despite global initiatives to stamp it out, such as the UN convention against corruption. The culture of secrecy surrounding access to resources in the developing world allows corrupt governments to hide revenues from their populations.

Companies from Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and Canada topped TI's list of bribe-payers last year, despite the introduction of anti-corruption laws to comply with an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development convention banning bribery of foreign officials.

"We are very much aware that a lot of the responsibility for corruption in the developing world has been with northern companies and northern institutions," said Mr Eigen.

Britain was singled out for dragging its feet on the implementation of the OECD convention. It only outlawed the bribing of officials abroad two years ago, and no one has been prosecuted so far.

Oil, a curse more often than a blessing for poor countries, is a significant factor in corruption. "The flow of oil money is so vast it can distort decision-making in poor producer countries and the rich world alike," the report says.

### **On the take**

**Head of state** Mohammed Suharto

**Place, time** Indonesia, 1967-98

**Amount** \$15bn-\$35bn

**Head of state** Ferdinand Marcos

**Place, time** Philippines, 1972-86

**Amount** \$5bn-\$10bn

**Head of state** Mobutu Sese Seko

**Place, time** Zaire, 1965-97

**Amount** \$5bn

**Head of state** Sani Abacha

**Place, time** Nigeria, 1993-98

**Amount** \$2bn-\$5bn

**Head of state** Slobodan Milosevic

**Place, time** Serbia, 1972-86

**Amount** \$1bn

**Head of state** Jean-Claude Duvalier

**Place, time** Haiti, 1971-86

**Amount** \$300m-\$800m

**Head of state** Alberto Fujimori

**Place, time** Peru, 1990-2000

**Amount** \$600m

**Head of state** Pavlo Lazarenko

**Place, time** Ukraine 1996-97

**Amount** \$114m-\$200m

**Head of state** Arnoldo Alemán

**Place, time** Nicaragua, 1997-2002

**Amount** \$100m

**Head of state** Joseph Estrada

**Place, time** Philippines, 1998-2001

**Amount** \$78m-\$80m