

■ Country drops 1 point on Corruption Perceptions Index...

## T&T 'has a lot to do'

■ Anna Ramdass

TRINIDAD and Tobago's ranking has slipped by one point on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2024. The report was delivered yesterday via a virtual conference by Trinidad and Tobago's Transparency Institute chair, Donna Jack-Hill.

The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories worldwide by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. The results are given on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

T&T's score is 41 for 2024, ranking 82nd out of 180 countries. The country slipped from a score of 42 in 2023. For the past six years, T&T's score has fluctuated between 40 and 42. In 2019 and 2020, T&T's CPI score was 40, increasing to 41 in 2021, and then 42 in 2022 and 2023.

Jack-Hill said the country has a lot to do in its fight against corruption. She said the CPI made recommendations to improve efforts in this fight, which include strengthening citizen engagement to enable those affected by the climate crisis to help tailor solutions.

'For those of us who speak with the public, we know that trust is waning in both our governance and our public institutions,' she said.

'We, the people, need to wake up from our slumber and mind the business that affects not only us but our future generations,' she urged.

Across the region, several nations have performed better than T&T.

Barbados scored 68; St Vincent and the Grenadines, 63; St Lucia, 59; and Dominica, 60.

Neighbouring Guyana also suffered a decline in its score, moving downwards from 40 to 39. Jamaica received a score of 44, whilst Venezuela scored 10. Countries in the top 10 with the highest scores are: Denmark (90), Finland (88), Singapore (84), New Zealand (83), Luxembourg (81), Norway (81), Switzerland (81), Sweden (80), the Netherlands (78), and Australia/ Iceland/ Ireland (77). Jack-Hill said despite these high scores, the CPI report cites 'trouble at the top' because, ironically, these countries have become attractive to corrupt actors seeking to launder and invest their ill-gotten gains for safekeeping.

**Eliminate loopholes, regulate professionals** She said whilst transnational corruption is outside the scope of the CPI and therefore does not affect these countries' scores, they must eliminate financial secrecy loopholes and better regulate and supervise professionals such as accountants, estate agents, and lawyers to counter this trend.

She noted countries scoring the lowest are fragile states and those riddled with conflict, such as South Sudan, Somalia and Venezuela.

Jack-Hill said more than two-thirds of the countries assessed scored below 50, strongly indicating serious corruption problems. The global average CPI score is 43.

She said moving closer to home, the regional average for the Americas is 42, and urgent action is needed to combat corruption.

She stated that leading the region this year are Uruguay, Canada and Barbados—all relatively stable democracies with high levels of transparency. At the other end of the index, states ravaged by organised crime and human rights abuses hold the lowest scores, such as Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

She said weak institutions and a lack of transparency allow criminal organisations to operate across wide swathes of the region.

The CPI 2024 theme is 'Corruption and the Climate Crisis', which shines a spotlight on how corruption in both the public and private sectors exacerbates environmental degradation, diverts vital resources, and worsens inequality. Jack-Hill pointed out that the impact of corruption on efforts to address the climate crisis has been largely overlooked, hindering progress in reducing emissions and adapting to the unavoidable effects of global heating. Many countries receiving climate funds also have serious corruption problems. Those vital funds are at risk of being lost due to corruption, she said.

She said that for decades, corrupt actors have misinformed the public and unduly influenced politicians' opinions to undermine strong climate action. She noted there are land and environmental defenders, but they are exposed to intimidation, violence and murder.

Jack-Hill said that of the 1,013 murders of environmental defenders since 2019, all took place in countries with CPI scores below 50.