

Corruption everybody's business everywhere

Corruption is global and impacts on all societies. **Hassen Lorgat** reveals how senior Korean union leaders were arrested for corruption as the Shaik trail was drawing to a close in South Africa.

Last month I presented a talk at the sixth global governance conference on Reinventing Governance in Seoul, South Korea. My input focused on SA's National Anti-Corruption Forum, which I argued, has the makings of a key forum for galvanising our national integrity systems and building an ethical, just and inclusive society and fighting corruption.

On the day of my departure from South Korea, the media was dominated by coverage on corruption within the ruling party, as well as their own Oilgate, and importantly the arrest of the former president of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), Lee Nam Soon. The media reported that he was briefly detained for allegedly taking a \$200 000 bribe from a construction company, for the establishment of a welfare centre for workers in Yoidi, Seoul. His former vice-president Kwon Won-pyo is also charged in the same case. Warrants of arrest for other leaders current and former have been issued. It is believed that prosecutors were investigating a 'dubious donation' made by a builder to the federation. The FKTU, *The Herald* reported, had earlier

insisted that the donation was above board and was to be used for the organisation's development fund.

This scandal comes amidst scandals involving many unions in a range of acts, such as embezzling union funds, taking kickbacks from businesses and from those seeking employment.

After I left Korea, it was reported that the teacher's union was embroiled in a corruption scandal involving the possible embezzlement of a government subsidy in 2001. Many experts and even most of the union insiders agree that these successive scandals are only the tip of an iceberg.

'What we see now is a rupture from festering problems our labour unions have. Labour should meet this crisis head-on,' Jung Kwang-ho, acting director general of FKTU said. Lee Yong-deuk, the incumbent president of FKTU, announced a range of measures including periodic audits of union finances by outside agencies and background checks of candidates seeking to hold elected posts in the unions. Media reports also confirmed that the KCTU plans to 'set up an investigative body to probe suspected corruption, within both the confederation organisation itself and within its subordinate unions.'

Korean labour experts have suggested that the union's hierarchical structure made it 'vulnerable to corruption by senior executives'. They also criticised the system of indirect elections in some unions and called for shorter terms of office for leadership, because many stay in office for nearly a decade, which they say may contribute to complacency and poor management of union affairs. According to *The Herald*, the Korea Labour Institute found that 42% of top leaders at FKTU have been holding leadership posts for at least nine years.

Back home it was Shaik and Zuma. A few months after Zuma was appointed deputy



president on 17 June, 1999, he addressed the ninth international anti-corruption conference in Durban organised by Transparency International. His address at this conference sounded very much like Mbeki's on 14 June.

Zuma said during his address 'It is important for us, on the eve of the new millennium, to examine the systems of government in our countries to ensure that we do not, ourselves, create the conditions for corruption to thrive. Countries of the world are gradually transforming to democratic systems of governance. In most countries these systems have checks and balances in place that sustain them and ensure that those entrusted with running public institutions are held accountable to the greater civil society.'

In South Africa we have, amongst others, the Public Protector, an independent Auditor-General.'

It is hoped that the experiences of Korea and closer to home provide some lessons. This all began with the arms deal, which is unlikely to leave many untouched, including the union movement.

Oh, space and time is up for me ...

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Lorgat is SANGOCO's media spokesman. This is the first in a series of articles linking community and labour issues.