Remarks by Thomas Gittens, UNDP Country Director, at Opening Ceremony
Anti-Corruption Training for Government Officials
Tuesday, April 24, 2012

Honorable Minister of Justice and Police, Mr. Misiedjan, staff of the Ministry of Justice and Police, Director of the Projekta Foundation, Ms. Ganga, Project Manager, Ms. Chandrikasingh, Participants in the course, Representatives of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Ministry of Justice and Police and UNDP are jointly implementing the Human Rights, Legal Access and Anti-Corruption project and it is therefore a great pleasure for me to say a few words here to mark the start of this activity. I would first like to commend the Ministry of Justice and Police, and more specifically, the Minister for allocating the funds for this short course for high level government officials on anti corruption.

Most of us know that corruption involves the payment of bribes, but corruption is much more than that. Corrupt practices rob the country of revenues, which could be used to implement development and social welfare policies, for example when corrupt public officials and business persons don’t pay taxes. It is detrimental for a country’s development when well-connected persons, who are not qualified to fulfill a certain position, are recruited for public sector positions through nepotism, patron client relationships and family ties. Corrupt practices can occur everywhere, in education, in public works, in health care, in the judicial sector and in all instances corruption benefits one person, or a group of people, but in the end it impacts negatively on development of the country.

The Corruption Perceptions Index 2011 published by Transparency International states as follows:

“The 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index shows that public frustration is well founded. No region or country in the world is immune to the damages of public-sector corruption, the vast majority of the 183 countries and territories assessed score below five on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean).

Public-sector governance that puts the interests of its citizens first is a responsibility that is not restricted to any border. Governments must act accordingly. For their part, citizens need to continue demanding better performance from their leaders.
The Bribe Payers Index 2011 also published by Transparency International states as follows:

“Foreign bribery has significant adverse effects on public well-being around the world. It distorts the fair awarding of contracts, reduces the quality of basic public services, limits opportunities to develop a competitive private sector and undermines trust in public institutions”. (p. 2)

The Bribe Payers Index 2011 emphasizes a critical role for Governments in curbing the scourge of bribe paying.

“Governments need to step up their anti-bribery efforts, starting with the ratification of key international conventions. Ratification must be complemented by a commitment to enforcement that includes dedicating appropriate resources to the investigation of bribery-related offences, and mustering sufficient political will to prosecute corporate bribery.” (p 9)

The UN General Assembly has designated 9 December as International Anti-Corruption Day. The UN member states thought it fitting that a special day be instituted to raise awareness of corruption and the role of the UN Convention in combating and preventing it. The United Nations Convention against Corruption has helped the public sector to make progress in deterring corruption. In 2009, the Convention’s States parties, which now number 148, established a peer review mechanism to identify gaps in national anti-corruption laws and practices — a major breakthrough that can help Governments halt bribe-taking and the embezzlement of public funds.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been involved in accountability, transparency and integrity programmes since the early 90s through the activities of our Country Offices as a necessary complement and instrument of the Organization’s mandate on poverty reduction, realization of the MDGs and promoting sustainable development.

Under the joint project with the Ministry of Justice and Police, UNDP is committed to assist the Government and people of Suriname to address corruption through the provision of technical support to draft national anti corruption legislation, and for training of key anti-corruption officials; the development of awareness strategies for Parliamentarians, Government Officials and the general public; and support for ratifying and operationalizing the UN Convention Against Corruption.

Training high level government officials is crucial in the fight against corruption. As Heads of departments you have decision making power and are in vulnerable position to be approached with bribes. It is important that you know and are able to recognize corruption in its various forms. I hope that this training gives you the confidence and the tools to also educate your staff about this very sensitive and important issue. In closing Honorable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to wish the participants in this course, a very fruitful and enduring learning experience.

I thank you for your attention.