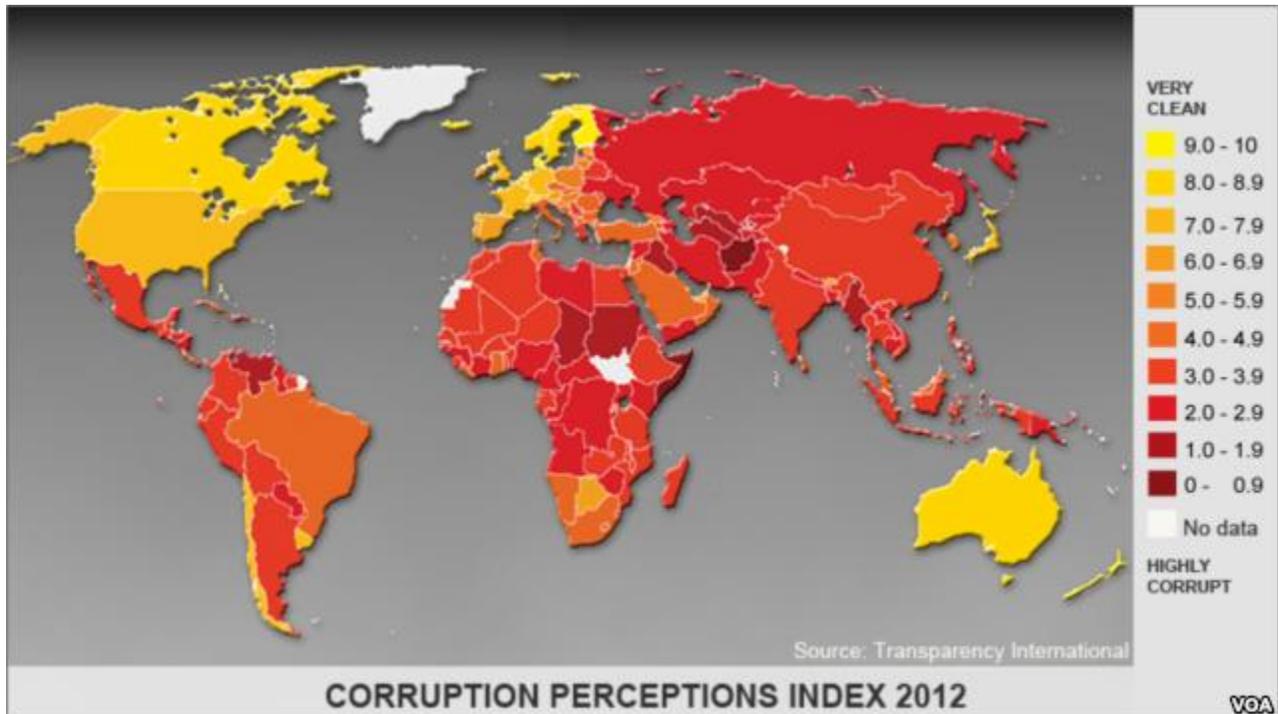


Anti-Corruption Group Says Abuse of Power Still 'Very High' in Many Countries



From VOA Learning English, this is the Economics Report in Special English.

A group that brings attention to the issue of corruption says levels of bribery, abuse of power and secret dealings are still "very high" in many countries.

Transparency International this week released its yearly Corruption Perceptions Index. The Berlin-based group rates 176 countries and territories with a number from zero to 100. Bigger numbers are better.

The index measures the perceived, or apparent, level of corruption in a country. The group uses information from a number of economic sources. They include the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum.

Corruption takes many forms. Transparency International calls it "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." One common form of corruption is bribery: the use of money or gifts to persuade another person to do something wrong or illegal. Corruption is not easy to measure because it is

secretive. But the World Bank estimates that about \$1 trillion in bribes are paid every year worldwide. Stealing public money is another form of corruption.

Huguette Labelle is chair of Transparency International. She says the problem of corruption affects millions of people and limits their ability to get necessary services.

"And in some countries it can be that 50 percent of the population had to pay a bribe to gain access to essential services like water, education, health, licenses."

A group of small, developed nations scored highest on the new list. Denmark, Finland and New Zealand received a rating of 90. Among large nations, the United States rated 73 while China rated 39.

The countries with the greatest perceived level of corruption on the list are Somalia, North Korea and Afghanistan with scores of 8.

Robin Hodess directs research at Transparency International. She says the index can show people involved in policy decisions how others see the issue of corruption in their countries.

"We need evidence about how corruption works. We need to know where to target the reforms needed to promote transparency, accountability and integrity."

The index measures perceptions held by experts, businesses and organizations. And their opinions are important. The World Bank notes that countries showing improvements in perception indexes had greater foreign investment and economic growth. However, foreign aid and international trade is less likely for countries perceived as highly corrupt.