**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Panama to Host International Forum on Combating Corruption in Procurement**

* **International experts will lead workshops on preventing collusion and corruption in public procurement processes.**
* **Financial regulators, prosecutors and procurement officials will travel to Panama for the event between the 10th and 13th September.**

**Panama City, 22nd July 2013 –**Panama will shortly play host to a regional forum to discuss techniques for tackling corruption and collusion in Latin American and Caribbean procurement.

Topics under discussion will include how to overcome potential conflicts between anti-corruption and anti-collusion strategies; measuring the cost and impact of illicit activities on procurement processes; and making optimal use of latest technologies and international guidelines to detect and deter fraud, corruption and collusion in public contracting.

International bodies have repeatedly highlighted collusion and corruption as serious problems in Latin America and Caribbean procurement. Such activity serves to distort market mechanisms and has dramatically reduced the efficiency of public expenditure. By improving preventative strategies and enhancing enforcement capacity, experts report, governments throughout the region could secure substantial savings on their procurement expenditure.

Over 150 senior financial regulators, prosecutors, procurement practitioners and policy makers are anticipated to attend the forum, which will be held in Panama City from 10th to 13th September.

During four days, approximately 15 international experts will lead a series of workshops, seminars and presentations to examine key lessons from recent emblematic procurement fraud cases, discuss prevention and risk management strategies, and provide guidance on meeting procurement standards outlined in the United Nations Convention against Corruption of the OECD, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank.

The conference, organised by UK consultancy firm the International Governance and Risk Institute (GovRisk), is a joint initiative of the UK Embassy in Panama, Panama’s Competition Commission (ACODECO), the Directorate of Government Procurement and Contracting (PanamaCompra), and the Regional Anti-Corruption Academy for Central America (ARAC), a body established by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the National Transparency and Freedom of Information Authority.

Eldis Sánchez, director of PanamaCompra and current president of the Inter-American Network for Government Procurement (RICG), added “we are extremely pleased to be collaborating with GovRisk and the UK Embassy to help address our procurement needs. This programme will provide a vitally important boost to the efforts of Panama and other countries to rectify inefficiencies in state purchasing processes”.

This initiative is financed as part of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth’s Prosperity Fund programme, which seeks to increase exports and investment, open markets, ensure access to resources and promote sustainable global growth. According to Matthew Phillips, Chargé d’Affaires at the UK Embassy, “transparency in public procurement is vitally important as it prevents corruption and stops resources from being diverted away from where they are most needed. The UK believes that bringing together state suppliers, procurement officers and the private sector to discuss the challenges they face in this area will be a key step towards reducing corruption and achieving sustainable growth”.

For further information about the programme, or for details on how to register, please contact Mark Willcock via the following address: mark.willcock@govrisk.org

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**Notes to editors:**

* Public procurement represents a significant proportion of government expenditure worldwide. OECD countries, for example, spend over 15% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on state purchases. The percentage in many developing countries is still higher.
* According to the World Economic Forum, public procurement is the area of government activity most vulnerable to corruption and fraud. Such illicit activity is often highly complex, takes many different forms and is notoriously difficult to detect.
* The **International Governance and Risk Institute (GovRisk)** is a British organisation which specialises in the delivery of high-level training and consultancy in the fields of anti-corruption, anti-money laundering and public procurement.
* The UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office launched the **Prosperity Fund** in April 2011 to tackle climate change, strengthen energy security and promote an open global economy in key emerging economies. Since its launch, the fund has supported almost 500 projects across a network of 14 countries and regions around the world.
* Through training and technical assistance the **Regional Anti-Corruption Academy for Central America** (ARAC) develops the capacity of public sector and other social actors in Central America and the Caribbean to help prevent, reduce and prosecute cases of corruption in the region.

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