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Holding The Line:

A discussion with Elizabeth “Betsy”
Andersen on corruption and hope in
uncertain times.

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Introduction

Corruption corrodes trust, weakens institutions, and undermines societies. Few people understand this better than **Elizabeth Andersen**, the new Executive Director of the [Basel Institute on Governance](#). With more than two decades of experience advancing the rule of law around the world, Andersen brings a wealth of insight into why corruption matters and how to confront it.

In this conversation, she discusses what drew her to the Basel Institute, the challenges of sustaining anti-corruption momentum in a turbulent geopolitical climate, and why, despite the setbacks, she remains deeply optimistic about the fight ahead.

Q: CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHAT DREW YOU TO THE BASEL INSTITUTE ON GOVERNANCE?

Elizabeth Andersen: I've spent more than 20 years working to strengthen the rule of law globally, and one of the most pressing challenges we face is corruption. It undermines institutions, harms societies, and erodes trust in government. The Basel Institute's reputation for impact made it a compelling place to continue this work.

What especially attracted me is its model: combining hands-on technical assistance with research and policy engagement. I was particularly drawn to the way in which the Basel Institute transforms lessons learnt from their very impactful technical assistance and case-based assistance on the ground into policy recommendations. These recommendations contribute to global conversations and policymaking that can in turn deliver systemic change. This virtuous cycle of on-the-groundwork, learning, and policy engagement was really very attractive to me as a terrific model.

Q: YOU PREVIOUSLY LED THE WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT. WHAT LESSONS ARE YOU BRINGING TO BASEL?

Elizabeth Andersen: Both organisations share a commitment to data-driven, evidence-based solutions. At the World Justice Project, I saw how indices can be powerful diagnostic tools and motivators for change, as countries or jurisdictions work to strengthen their scores. They open the door for really important conversations on the path forward for change. I intend to carry this work forward to the Basel Institute, as I believe the [Basel AML Index](#) – our flagship tool for assessing risks of money laundering and related financial crimes at the country level – has the potential to achieve even more than what it is already doing.

Another key point these organisations have in common is the value they place on multi-stakeholder approaches. The rule of law isn't just for lawyers and judges: it requires governments, businesses, and civil society to work together. At Basel, one of the ways in which we're advancing that vision is through [Collective Action initiatives](#). These bring together the private sector and other stakeholders – typically government and civil society – in sustained, collaborative efforts to overcome shared corruption challenges and raise standards of business integrity and fair competition. I look forward to building on the Basel Institute's track record in convening such multi-stakeholder initiatives, so critical to combating corruption effectively.

Q: FROM GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS, TO THE THREAT OF WAR, TO TARIFFS, TO CLIMATE CHANGE, WITH SO MANY URGENT GLOBAL ISSUES, HOW DO YOU KEEP ANTI-CORRUPTION ON THE AGENDA?

Elizabeth Andersen: This is something I have been thinking about a lot– in particular about the ways in which we need to frame, or reframe, the work that we do in terms of the policy priorities that prevail today. We have to link corruption to today's top policy concerns, whether that's defence spending, organised crime, or the energy transition. There is an important corruption dimension to all of these contemporary priorities. By highlighting that connection through research, we can make the case that anti-corruption work isn't a distraction or unnecessary expense; it's foundational and an investment in long-term success.

Illicit financial flows are another critical issue. These are not victimless crimes, but ones that rob communities of resources. Especially at a time when development assistance is shrinking, asset recovery and international cooperation to return stolen funds are more urgent than ever. That has always been at the core of the Institute's work, but it feels all more urgent now.

Q: SOME ARGUE MOMENTUM ON ASSET RECOVERY IS WANING. DO YOU AGREE?

Elizabeth Andersen: In fact, demand for our support in partner countries is growing. We have more demand than we can currently meet from governments asking us to help them develop capacity to investigate, prosecute, and recover assets.

We're also seeing governments adopt stronger legal tools, such as non-conviction based forfeiture and improved anti-money laundering frameworks. And international cooperation mechanisms are maturing, which gives me confidence that progress is possible.

There may be some fatigue, but there is also a growing awareness that asset recovery is not only a strategy for recovering stolen assets and obtaining much needed resources; it also acts as a deterrent and signals that organised crime will not pay.

We also find a lot of promise in the work of the [International Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre \(IACCC\)](#), the ongoing [Global Forum on Asset Recovery \(GFAR\)](#) series, and the [GlobE Network](#) – the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities. This kind of international cooperation on anti-corruption and asset recovery is essential, and there are a lot of opportunities to enhance it through such initiatives.

In this context, Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy's commitment to tackling illicit finance and the announcement of a summit next year on this topic are really important. The summit represents a great opportunity for financial centres in particular to re-energise and re-focus the fight against illicit finance.

Q: HOW DOES BASEL BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND LOCAL REALITIES?

Elizabeth Andersen: This is a really important question, and its answer is a legacy of Gretta Fenner, the Basel Institute's Managing Director for many years who tragically passed away in 2024. I am proud to say that we never parachute in with a one-size-fits-all presentation. For example, each Basel Institute training on financial investigations and asset recovery is tailored to the local context — to reference the local laws, the local procedures, even the local evidence and context in which crime happens. And this training is typically followed up with mentoring by expert advisors who are often embedded directly with partner agencies in the country.

This high-touch approach is time intensive, but it's the only way to ensure international standards translate into meaningful local practice, and this is something the Institute really excels in.

Q: FUNDING CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY RISING FROM THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION'S DECISIONS TO CUT USAID, HAVE SHAKEN CIVIL SOCIETY. HOW IS BASEL RESPONDING?

Elizabeth Andersen: We're incredibly fortunate to have a loyal group of donors who have sustained or even increased their support. We don't take it for granted, however, so we're also working to diversify funding, including by engaging the private sector. Many companies now recognise that good governance is essential to their bottom line.

We've also received generous support for education from individuals, such as scholarships for our new graduate-level anti-corruption and asset recovery courses with the University of Basel. Investing in the next generation of leaders is something I'm particularly excited about. I really want to give a shout out to the International Academy of Financial Crime Litigators, which has through the Academy itself, and a couple of generous members committed to fund two scholarships for talented professionals who would otherwise not be able to attend the course.

Q: TALKING ABOUT THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WHAT ROLE DOES THE PRIVATE SECTOR PLAY IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION?

Elizabeth Andersen: It's a critical role. We've promoted Collective Action for decades, helping to establish initiatives like the Wolfsberg Group and the Metals Technology Initiative. On our B20 Collective Action Hub – a leading free resource centre on this approach – we've documented over 300 such initiatives. This growing dataset allows us to identify what works when engaging the private sector in fighting corruption. It allows us to push beyond rhetoric or box-ticking towards initiatives that have meaningful impact.

Q: DESPITE SETBACKS, WHAT KEEPS YOU HOPEFUL?

Elizabeth Andersen: Above all, the people. My colleagues at Basel, many recruited by my predecessor Gretta Fenner, are extraordinarily talented and committed. Our partners around the world often take up this cause at personal risk, which is deeply inspiring.

And then there are the broader networks drawn from government, businesses, civil society, the media and ordinary citizens, standing up against corruption. When you see that collective energy, it's impossible not to feel optimistic.

Q: FINALLY, WHAT RESEARCH IS BASEL PRIORITISING NEXT?

Elizabeth Andersen: We're looking closely at how to strengthen legal tools while safeguarding human rights, for example, with a comparative study of non-conviction-based forfeiture laws. We're also exploring mechanisms to help ensure fines from foreign bribery cases can be used to support anti-corruption initiatives, including in communities that have been harmed by corruption.

Both areas aim to make anti-corruption and asset recovery frameworks not only more effective, but also more just.

PROFILE



Elizabeth 'Betsy' Andersen

[Elizabeth "Betsy" Andersen](#) is the Executive Director of the Basel Institute on Governance, where she leads the Institute's strategic direction and oversees its global efforts to counter corruption, strengthen governance and promote integrity in the public and private sectors. She assumed the role in March 2025, following a distinguished career at the intersection of law, justice, governance and international development. Before joining the Institute, Betsy served as Executive Director of the World Justice Project, a non-profit organisation working internationally to advance the rule of law.