



**{jcomments off}**It pays to do business in an ethical manner », US Embassy official tells Amcham.

“Giving a bribe, or accepting one, could turn out to be long-term time bomb that could sooner, rather than later, explode in your face.” That was the essence of what Mr. Erik Martini of the US Embassy told AmCham members in Douala on April 13, 2010.

Mr. Martini was the guest speaker at the AmCham monthly luncheon. He focused his presentation on the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), which the US Congress enacted into law in 1977, which makes it unlawful for US citizens and businesses to bribe foreign government officials to obtain or retain business. This law was later amended in 1998 to cover foreign firms and persons doing business with US companies.

We learned that a Cameroonian businessman or woman, who accepts a bribe from a US firm to facilitate the latter’s business transactions in Cameroon, is just as liable for prosecution in a US court of law as the firm offering the bribe. The question then arose as to how the US arm of justice could get to someone in Cameroon, who falls foul of this law. The answer was that such

an official better avoid making a stop-over at any US airports because they would be whisked off the plane and taken directly into jail. Examples were given of foreign businesspeople being taken off the plane at US ports of entry, even if such executives had no intention of setting foot on US soil.

To stress the seriousness of this law, the guest speaker cited several cases of US companies being heavily fined for falling foul of the FCPA. He also indicated that such an anti-corruption law was not unique to the United States of America. Great Britain recently passed a law said to be even more stringent governing the way their companies do business abroad. Many eye-brows were raised when the US diplomat listed France as one of the European countries with laws prohibiting French companies from bribing foreign government officials to obtain a business advantage.

After the animated question-and-answer session, Amcham Executive Secretary, Charmian Penda, thanked Mr. Martini for coming to talk to Amcham members about this sensitive issue of doing business ethically with US firms. She further noted with delight that Amcham membership had grown to an impressive 80 members but regretted that paid membership was rather slow. She noted that the year was just about half way gone but that only a handful of members had paid their 2010 contribution. She praised small companies that tend to renew their membership faster than the bigger players, noting that it is precisely such bigger players who pay sponsor membership, a good source of funds for Amcham activities. She hoped that both new and old members would pay or renew their contribution to enable Amcham to fulfil its mission for this year without a hitch.

***by Martin Jumbam***