

Draft Report to Plenary

Before reporting on the findings of our group I would like to extend a note of thanks to the many that participated and shared their views, especially our designated speakers. We had more than 60 participants and almost 50 presented their views and comments.

It was quite evident that the issue at hand had been given serious consideration by all

A variety of common themes emerged throughout our discussions and if there was one thing that especially gave me hope it was the fact that all believed that political corruption in its varied facets must and can be overcome.

All who spoke shared a belief in the transformative power of democratic politics. A politics in which we belong with our respective citizenry can make our representative institutions become what they should be - institutions respecting the needs and wishes of the people.

In the aftermath of the Cold War democratic practices have spread to a large number of erstwhile authoritarian states. We can therefore reasonably conclude that a far greater number of people now possess opportunities to exercise a significant degree of collective control over the decisions of their government than ever before in human history.

Needless to say, this trend has also enhanced the role of authority of the elected member - a role which carries with it significant responsibilities.

If, however, the public comes to believe that their representatives cannot affect major areas of importance then they will become cynical about politics and disengage themselves from public debate.

As elected members, we retain the ability to ensure that matters turn out differently. It is important that we practice a critical, energetic and reflective politics. It is also imperative that we have the tools to do so.

As one of our speakers noted, the role of individual parliamentarians will only be as effective as the structures surrounding them. It therefore comes as little surprise that much conversation was taken up with the need to ensure for:

- An effective legislative oversight of the executive
- Strengthening or ensuring, the provision of effective parliamentary officers such as the Auditor General
- Ensuring that party discipline does not degenerate into an excessive executive domination of the legislature; and,
- Ensuring for an effective parliamentary opposition that can go about its business without fear of retribution.

A theme which emerged from delegates of emerging democracies that the state in many instances was still a vehicle for corruption. That is, entrepreneurs are still tied to a state network of nepotism and patronage. Here, regime change has not done away with, political corruption,

Indeed, the foregoing should be of little surprise given the fact that one of the more serious problems noted was the lack of accountability with respect to international institutions. The lack of transparency with regard to moneys lent by international financial institutions to developing countries was a matter of concern to many. Those commenting argued that there needs to be transparency and that organizations such as the IMF and World Bank should be open in letting citizens know how much and for what purpose monies have been lent. As well, better follow up on whether or not it has been spent appropriately would be welcome.

It was also argued that it is important for parliamentarians to accept the responsibility of educating their constituents, We need to ensure that those we represent are aware of the broader context in which policy decisions are made in today's world of increased globalization.

Delegates also stressed the increasingly important role of NGOs as sources of information. Given their research and access to client groups, NGOs can provide an important information base of legislators. Many are today arguing that NGOs, because of their experience and cultural sensitivity, are an essential ingredient in establishing long-term solutions to the many problems being faced by countries in the midst of domestic turmoil and strife. Their reports and analysis offer a sound and important source of information.

Delegates also stressed the importance of parliamentarians finding common sense in supporting colleagues in different countries who are fighting political corruption. The struggle against corruption will, needless to say, be more difficult in some jurisdictions than others.

It is here where the role of GOPAC becomes particularly important. When asking ourselves "where do we go from here?" it is perhaps the security of the individual parliamentarian fighting corruption upon which we should first focus our attention. We can all agree that an independent media is important. We all understand the importance of the oversight function of the legislature and its officers, no one needs to remind us free and open elections are the bedrock of democratic rule, nor that an independent media is a necessity for free and open debate.

I wonder if perhaps the really important question before us is "what can we as an institution do to help those sacrificing their careers, if not their lives, on behalf of the principles we here espouse.

We did not come up with a ready-made formula, but I think that we can all agree that if GOPAC is to become a force for democratization and the fight against corruption we, as an institution, need:

- To help publicize the plight of those parliamentarians fighting against corruption;
- To establish a mechanism for helping their legal battles with governments that oppress parliamentarians fighting corrupt regimes and practices.
- To ensure that transparency at all levels of decision making becomes a reality;

- To ensure that all participating nations of GOPAC adopt international regimes relevant to the fight against political corruption - especially those dealing with human rights and the sanctity of the individual.
- To ensure that international monetary organizations adopt relevant practices of openness and transparency in their dealings with client governments;
- To establish a mechanism whereby relevant information concerning the fight against corruption can be shared by participating countries and their parliaments
- To help participating countries establish relevant regimes of transparency and disclosure with respect to the financial holdings of parliamentarians and members of the executive;
- To help participating countries establish appropriate "access to information guidelines";
- To help promote an independent media in host countries.

None of this will be easy. But then democracy is a cumbersome form of e. It never expects that matters be solved quickly or to the liking of those with ready-made plans.

GOPAC needs to focus on both individual MPs and Parliaments as institutions.

It cannot choose to help either just individuals or just parliaments.

Now here are some of the concrete suggestions on how GOPAC and its regional chapters can help both individual MPs and Parliaments:

GOPAC can:

- Assist with drafting and implementing the laws on freedom of information
- Assist in creating an information sharing network for GOPAC members, electronic discussion, creation of a web page
- Develop an inventory of laws relating to and do a comparative study and make relevant recommendations.
- Create "best practices manual" and put it on it's web page Put pressure on making transparent international financial transactions
- Could help in developing professional research in this area that is available to parliamentarians
- could help develop educational tools that can be used by NGOs and local educational institutions
- Should be instrumental in publicizing the right of Parliaments persecuted because of their stand against corruption
- Help with advice on drafting the UN Convention on anti- corruption which is expected to be approved by 2004.