

## Workshop: Participation of Society

### Draft GOPAC Position Statement and Resolution on Participation of Society

*Accountability flourishes when a healthy balance of power exists between the state, civil society, marketplace and international arena with no one institutional sphere being in absolute control.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Context

Without diminishing the overwhelming importance of the periodic election of representatives to parliament as a key element of democratic governance, the on-going engagement of citizens and civil society on public policy issues is an essential complement. The UNCAC, in Article 13, addresses the participation of society in the fight against corruption. It states that each state will take appropriate measures within its means and laws to promote the active participation of individuals and groups in society in the prevention of corruption. It also refers to the state raising public awareness regarding the existence, causes and gravity and the threat posed by corruption. It further suggests that the participation of society may be strengthened by measures such as

- enhanced transparency and promoting the contribution of the public to decision-making processes
- public access to information
- public information activities that contribute to non-tolerance of corruption such as public education programmes, including school curricula
- respecting, promoting and protecting the freedom of information related to corruption
- ensuring that the public is aware of anti-corruption bodies set up as part of implementing the UNCAC in a particular country

Communications links between government (including parliament) and citizens may be seen as operating in at least four different ways:

- providing information, such as through web sites
- hearing complaints, seeking corrective action
- participation, seeking citizen input on legislation or policies
- engagement, involving citizens in solving problems and mutual learning.

#### Position Statement

Although the executive branch of government engages citizens directly in many different ways – its head in presidential systems being elected directly – the executive typically is required to report to parliament and seek parliamentary approval of legislation, including to obtain and use public resources. Parliament therefore, in GOPAC's view, has a critical role in engaging citizens on all public policy issues. This is particularly important for integrity in governance, since the locus of the majority of corruption is associated with the financial and administrative aspects of government, matters handled by the executive branch. Therefore in addition to strengthening its capacity and performance in carrying out its legislative and oversight roles, it also needs to consider its capacity and performance in engaging citizens – its representation role.

In view of rather consistent citizen survey results that indicate a low level of trust in parliaments, GOPAC believes its members must look at all areas of communication – providing information, receiving and

