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Fighting corruption a lonely job

GOPAC secretary Mary King:

By Joel Julien joel.julien@trinidadexpress.com
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FIGHTING corruption is a very lonely job, especially for parliamentarians, secretary of the board of directors for the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) Mary King has said.

GOPAC however has now launched a regional chapter to provide "peer support" for those in the fight.

Last week GOPAC held a two day Anti-Corruption Conference of Caribbean Parliamentarians in this country.

The conference was attended by parliamentarians from eight Caribbean countries.

On the last day of the conference they all joined forces to launch GOPAC Caribbean.

"Success in the fight against corruption requires collaboration and strong partnerships between nations," King said.

Akaash Maharaj, GOPAC's executive director, said legislators have to reassert themselves "as the sword and shield of the democratic process". Maharaj said because GOPAC is a "strictly nonpartisan" organisation it would be able to bring parliamentarians of all parties together against corruption.

"One of the greatest allies of corruption is a divided population and a divided legislature," he said.

Maharaj lamented that we are currently living in a time when people distrust politicians.

"There is no denying that we are living in a period of tremendous public cynicism about politics and politicians and the very idea of public service. Cynicism easily breeds despair and despair leads into indifference and indifference is an ally to corruption," Maharaj said.

"What the corrupt want is for the people to feel that nothing can be done, that the corrupt are too powerful, too entrenched and too ubiquitous," he said.

King said unlike most other jobs parliamentarians are not trained for their positions.

This must be changed and proper training provided, she said.

St Lucia's Minister for Commerce, Business Development, Investment, Consumer Affairs and Parliamentary Representative for Gros-Islet Emma Hippolyte lauded the GOPAC initiative.

Hippolyte said at the conference she was able to work with Opposition counterparts and brainstorm ways to effect change for their island.

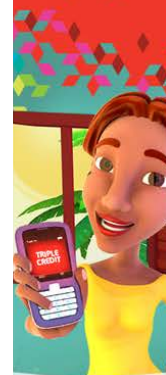
Jamaica's Member of Parliament for St Ann North-Western said it is time to return beauty to politics

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and remove the blemish of corruption.

Maharaj said there is currently an "unhealthy centralisation of power in the hands of the Executive branch of government".

"It is a disservice to democracy, it diminishes the ability of people at large to know and understand the government. It not only enables, it invites corruption," he said.

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