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Using Parliamentary Tools to Fight Corruption

By [Charles Chauvel](#) / November 16, 2013 / [3 Comments](#)

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Corruption (defined as the abuse of public office for private gain) is a clear threat to development, democracy and international security. It distorts economic development and subverts political decision-making, stunting growth and creating political instability. It also distorts the proper functioning of democratic institutions.



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Tomorrow, I leave New York for Moldova, where UNDP, in conjunction with Sweden and Denmark, is hosting a regional parliamentarians' anti-corruption forum. MPs and officials from Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, the Ukraine, and Bulgaria will be comparing experiences with counterparts from the Netherlands, the Nordic countries, and elsewhere. [I'll be making the first presentation of UNDP's new anti-corruption toolkit for parliamentarians](http://www.u4.no/recommended-reading/preventing-corruption-a-toolkit-for-parliamentarians/) (<http://www.u4.no/recommended-reading/preventing-corruption-a-toolkit-for-parliamentarians/>) including a self-assessment tool for MPs to help chart compliance with the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). UNDP co-authored the toolkit with GOPAC – the Global Organisation Of Parliamentarians Against Corruption. I founded the New Zealand Chapter of GOPAC in 2012. GOPAC does great work around the world – its most recent chapter was founded in Sri Lanka only last month, as I found out when I was there recently on a parliamentary strengthening mission.

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The ability of parliament to actively conduct oversight of the government through its various tools and committees is a critical means of ensuring transparency and accountability in government and its officials. The main means by which a parliament monitors the work of the executive, to ensure the laws passed and the funds allocated by the parliament are fully and accurately implemented, is through parliamentary committees. Committees have the specific powers and authority to call evidence, demand testimony from senior government officials and subpoena documents. By conducting routine or extraordinary hearings and investigations, committees have a strong knowledge of what is occurring in the aspects of the government under its purview. Specialized committees, such as New Zealand's Finance and Expenditure Committee – which I used to chair – have a special relationship with the state auditor. Increasingly, good practice sees it chaired by an opposition MP to ensure it is more diligent in its efforts to monitor the government. MPs have access to other tools as well to investigate government activity. These include question periods and interpellations to allow for examining Ministers about specific allegations or issues. In order to do such work effectively, MPs often engage with civil society organisations that also monitor government expenditures and activities.

UNDP is actively engaged in building a network and momentum for parliamentary action against corruption. In the area for which I am responsible in UNDP – parliamentary development – there are 68 active projects around the world. 49 of these provide support to the oversight function of Parliament, and 24 focus specifically on supporting parliaments in fighting against corruption. Projects in countries as diverse as Kiribati, Tuvalu, Samoa, Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Serbia, Georgia, and Bangladesh have included anti-corruption work. Last year we organized three workshops – in Burkina Faso, Morocco and Timor Leste – to test and review the toolkit that I will be presenting in Moldova. It comprises of a series of questions and checklists that help to identify gaps in the effectiveness of a parliament’s contribution to the implementation of UNCAC. By identifying the most serious gaps, plans can be put in place to strengthen parliament’s anti-corruption procedures, including legislation, executive oversight, budgetary control and the protection of standards of conduct in public life.

In the [world we want survey](http://www.worldwewant2015.org/) (<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/>) that UNDP conducted recently on what the post-2015 Development Agenda should look like, clean, open, transparent government was one of the top 4 priorities for the 1.6 million people who responded. I hope the anti-corruption toolkit will play a small but important part in moving forward to achieve this.

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