

**Address by Akaash Maharaj, GOPAC Executive Director
to the UNODC Implementation Review Group Briefing for NGOs**

11h30 (CEST / UTC+2), Thursday 05 June 2014
United Nations HQ Vienna

Thank you Mr Chair.

My name is Akaash Maharaj, and I am the Executive Director of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, or GOPAC. We are a worldwide alliance of legislators who have come together to combat corruption, strengthen democratic institutions, and uphold the rule of law.

Our members come from different cultures, speak different languages, profess different faiths, pursue different political philosophies, and have been on opposite sides of history and warfare. But we are united by a common conviction: that corruption is one of the greatest threats to the stability of nations and to the rights of all mankind, and that it is the responsibility of legislators, as the representatives and servants of the people, to be their sword and their shield in the fight against corruption.

We thank the UNODC for holding this forum, and creating an opportunity to strengthen the UN Convention Against Corruption by broadening global engagement. We recognise that the question of how to let the light of public participation in on the Convention review process remains controversial, and we are grateful to the UNODC for its efforts to part the curtains, even if it can not yet throw open the doors.

Doubtlessly, much of our deliberations today will focus on imperfections in both the application and in the construction of the Convention. This is as it should be. But it does not blind any of us to the fact that the Convention has been a signal achievement, both in the heights of its ambitions and in the breadth of its adoption. And especially for parliamentarians in emerging democracies, the Convention has become something of a *Magna Carta* of anti-corruption, establishing globally-endorsed minimum standards that shapes their national debate.

GOPAC's parliamentarians have asked me to speak to the imperative that implementation of the Convention be framed in the international system as a beginning – rather than an end – in the struggle for public integrity, to enable rather than to circumscribe international action.

In particular, we are committed to ensuring that the Convention principles can be applied and enforced against instances of Grand Corruption.

We believe that there are some forms of corruption so grave, whose effects on human life, human rights, and human welfare are so catastrophic, that they should shock the conscience of the international community and mobilise the will of nations to act across borders.

Too often, the perpetrators of Grand Corruption are able to use their illicit wealth and power to pervert and co-opt the national institutions that should call them to account. As a result, the worst offenders are the least likely to face domestic justice. In such cases, when national authorities are unwilling or unable to act, we believe that the international community has a responsibility to step forward.

The most recent UNCAC Conference of States Parties, held in Panama City, included the largest Forum of Parliamentarians in the Convention's history. Those parliamentarians voted unanimously for GOPAC to seek to establish Grand Corruption as an international crime, to enable international institutions and alliances to apprehend, prosecute, judge, and sentence the guilty.

We are now pursuing four parallel tracks to give effect to their declaration.

The first is to expand the number of national courts asserting universal jurisdiction over Grand Corruption. The second is to make use of regional courts in Africa, Europe, and Latin America. The third is to press for an expansion of the jurisdiction of international institutions. The fourth is a series of civil law innovations to focus on undoing damages to victims.

Each of these approaches has its strengths and weaknesses, and each strikes a different balance between the ideal and the feasible.

We know that the path will be hard, that the journey will be long, and that we will be beset at every step by those who have grown comfortable with the *status quo*.

But we hope that the institutions and actors who have come together under the Convention will join hands with us, and that as the Convention grows into itself, its international co-operation and enforcement provisions will play a part in our efforts.

But together or alone, we are pressing on.

The members of GOPAC are the lawmakers of the world, and we recognise our collective responsibility for enacting the national legislation necessary to create a world where there is no safe harbour for Grand Corruption.

We take this responsibility seriously. In Panama City, the Forum of Parliamentarians also voted unanimously to declare that in its very worst forms, Grand Corruption is a Crime Against Humanity.

We believe that ending such crimes is the mandate of history, and we intend to be equal to the call. We hope you that the convention and its partners will be with us.

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For more information about GOPAC's efforts on international prosecution of Grand Corruption, please visit http://gopacnetwork.org/programs/grand_corruption/

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