Address to the TI 20th Anniversary Panel on “Joining Forces”
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Check against delivery

Of course, I should like to begin by congratulating Transparency International on its twentieth anniversary: not for its longevity, but instead for how much it has achieved in so brief a period.

Twenty years ago, when Peter Eigen and his nine stalwarts founded Transparency International, speaking of corruption was often considered more unacceptable than being corrupt.

Today, the last BBC World Speaks poll revealed that corruption has become the single most discussed issue around the globe: across the all the world’s continents, cultures, societies, languages, ethnicities, religions, and political systems. Corruption was the evil that dare not speak its name. It is now the evil whose name is on the lips of nearly every person on the planet.

Transparency International has been one of the leading lights in this transformation.

Over the past twenty years, we have won the argument against corruption. The challenge of the next twenty years will be to win the struggle against corruption. The people of the world must be empowered to not just expose and denounce corruption, but to defeat it.

But make no mistake: we are at a perilous juncture in our journey.

As a worldwide alliance of parliamentarians, GOPAC’s members understand the power of public opinion and public will mobilised and focussed towards a single objective. But we also understand the risks.

Right now, people are outraged over corruption as never before, as the revolutions of the Arab Spring make clear. But if it is denied a constructive outlet, rage quickly turns to cynicism, cynicism to despair, and despair to indifference. And after fear and greed, indifference is the greatest enabler of corruption.

We must build upon the momentum of the past twenty years, and press words into deeds, otherwise future generations will judge us harshly for having squandered our legacy.
In that context, I think it is important for us to reflect on what it is that hangs in the balance in our struggle.

• More than a $1 trillion are paid in bribes every year, according to the World Bank.
• More than $2.1 trillion per year are siphoned off through illicit transnational financial flows, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.
• More than $3.1 trillion are stolen from the nations of the world through tax evasion, according to the Tax Justice Network.

Let me put this in context. The much-vaunted Millennium Development Goals include:

• eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, and
• establishing universal primary education, and
• reducing child mortality by two-thirds, and
• reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters, and
• halting the spread of HIV and malaria, and
• halving the proportion of people without access to clean water and sanitation, and
• and promoting gender equality in schools and the workforce.

All of this – all of it – would cost no more than a total of $481 billion in development aid.

What the world loses to corruption in a single year would be enough to end the worst forms of human misery and transform human civilisation itself, at least a dozen times over. There is a better world at our feet, a world that our ancestors could only dream of. And corruption is stealing it from us.

We are not fighting for some abstract notion of accounting rectitude. We are fighting for the very dreams of the human race.

For our part, GOPAC has staked out the ground on which we intend to fight over the coming years.

At our Global Conference earlier this year, our parliamentary members from across the world unanimously mandated our organisation to seek to establish Grand Corruption as a crime at international law, to enable international institutions and alliances to pursue, apprehend, prosecute, judge, and sentence the guilty.

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 evade domestic justice, in direct proportion to the scale of their illicit wealth and power. As a result, the worst perpetrators of corruption are the least likely to be called to account domestically. And in such cases, when domestic institutions are unwilling or unable to act, the international community has a responsibility to step forward.

Every year, corruption kills more people than war and famine combined. In its very worst incarnations, Grand Corruption is an affront and an assault against the common good of all mankind. It is more than just an offence at law; it is a Crime Against Humanity, and should be treated as such.

The world is littered with men and women who feed on the misery of entire societies, who have grown fat in their spoils and comfortable in their impunity, sheltering behind national jurisdictions that they have been able to twist to their benefit. But there is a higher law; there is a deeper justice. And it falls to all of us to be its sword and its shield over the next twenty years.

But we recognise that this is not a fight that any of us is strong enough to win on our own.

We will succeed if and only if we can build a vigilant, relentless, and fearless coalition of citizens and parliamentarians, standing together between the corrupt and the levers of power.

It is not a process that any of us take for granted.

Parliamentarians are the watchdogs of democracy, and it is tragic that so many citizens of so many nations perceive our watchdogs as having muted their bark, muzzled their bite, and been neutered by the very powers they were meant to hold at bay.

CSOs and grassroots movements are the most directly accessible outlets for the popular will, and it is just as tragic that so many parliamentarians of so many nations perceive them to be unaccountable forces that threaten to trample representative democracy in their haste to press their agendas.

If any of us and any of our plans are to succeed over the next twenty years, then parliamentarians must inspire cynical citizens to believe that the political process can be part of the solution, not only part of the problem. Citizens must stir courage in timorous legislators to stare down those who know no restraint.

And institutions like Transparency International must convince both groups to have faith that together, we can achieve the victory over corruption that none of us can reach alone.

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