

MEETING SUMMARY

9th Forum of Parliamentarians – Implementing Integrity El-Fayrouz, International Convention Center, Egypt, Wednesday, 17 December 2021

The 9th Forum of Parliamentarians has been held as a special event during the 9th Conference of the State Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) on 17 December 2021, 9am – 10am Egypt Time. The forum was conducted in a hybrid session, with the in-person meeting situated in El-Fayrouz Room, the Sharm El-Sheikh International Convention Center, Egypt. Hon. Mardani Ali Sera (in-person/Indonesia) and Mr. John Hyde (virtual/Australia) moderated the session. The overall theme of the Forum was Implementing Integrity.

OPENING NOTE

Hon. Mardani Ali Sera moderated the session by briefly introducing the Forum's aim. He elaborated the key components of good practice of UNCAC implementation, including enacting anti-corruption policies and ensuring effective parliamentary oversight. Such practices are becoming more significant during the pandemic since emergencies can enable corruption to thrive. The Forum focused on the engagement of parliamentarians and the role they can play in implementing UNCAC and UNGASS commitments to achieve a holistic national integrity situation.

Mr. John Hyde welcomed all distinguished participants and briefly introduced all the panellists who could take part in this hybrid meeting. He expressed regret that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some GOPAC members could not attend the meeting in person.

PANEL SESSION

Dr. Fadli Zon, Vice Chair GOPAC, Chair of SEAPAC

Dr. Zon presented a thematic issue of integrity by promoting legislative openness in the South-East Asia region. He highlighted that corruption thrives in an environment of secrecy. Therefore, he quoted a metaphor introduced by Former Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court, Louis D Brandeis, “sunlight is the best disinfectant,” as a vital symbolization of transparency that is crucial to combat corruption.

Parliament can be a strong driver to promote reform towards transparency. He stressed that open parliament is essential in narrowing the gap between the legislature and effective public decisions. He then explained several ways for parliament to support openness. The legislative institution can work to influence reform towards transparency in the government. He mentioned the Parliament of Malaysia, which has been influential in promoting open data to the government.

Another working area where parliament can promote openness is by establishing an independent national action plan under a co-creation process with civil society. He informed the participant that the Indonesian House of Representatives is the first within the region to adopt an independent national action plan. The national action plan comprised six action plans that were co-created and co-developed with civil society. Openness in parliament is essential, and it is also in line with the implementation of Articles 10 and 13 of the UNCAC.

He stressed that Openness in Parliament is also promoted within Open Government Partnership (OGP) framework. He welcomed the new Memorandum of Parliamentary Engagement adopted by the OGP to emphasize that parliament can contribute to developing an openness regime. However, he stressed that the success of legislative

reform towards openness would also depend on other enabling factors such as free and robust media, civil society, the sanctioning mechanism, and political will. It is also important to ensure that an effective democratic building reform is in place to build open parliament. As Chair of SEAPAC, he elaborated that the organization plans to reinforce engagement with ASEAN and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) to ensure the South-East Asia way of consensus can be developed in a more transparent and accessible way.

Dr. Carlos Alberto Peres Cuevaz, Vice Chair GOPAC, Chair of GOPAC Latin America

Dr. Cuevaz elaborated his presentation on an overall thematic issue of corruption and the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Latin America. He firstly informed the participants that according to the Transparency International (TI) report, which highlights the link between corruption in the health sector and countries' limited capacity in tackling the COVID-19 infections. Countries in Latin America, including those in other parts of the world, have a corruption risk that makes COVID-19 pandemic responses less effective. He raised an example of a health equipment procurement markup that can reach more than 1000% of its standard price.

The wave of corruption has worsened the health crisis. Such challenge, coupled with the lack of vaccines, hit the poor and the marginalized. It is, therefore, parliamentary oversight is particularly relevant. As a parliamentarian, we can contribute to law and oversight, particularly in public purchases. The government authority has an obligation to report to the parliament on budget management, which needs to be overseen to ensure that no one is left behind. Data from the Global Corruption Barometer reveals that the Government is not doing its best to counter corruption. It is reported that corruption raised within the last 12 months. The cost of corruption in Latin America reaches almost 220 billion USD.

He elaborated on challenges in Latin America concerning corruption and meeting public demand. He stressed the need to address the citizens' needs during health emergencies. The need to have a data-based technology to address corruption was also raised. Dr. Cuevaz highlighted the need to have permanent involvement with the civil society organizations in Latin America to ensure that the civil society has a vibrant environment. It is also crucial to ensure that the control organism effectively controls spending and recovery programs.

Dr. Cuevaz informed participants that GOPAC Latin America envisions expanding its operation by including the US and Canada as part of their regional coverage. GOPAC Latin America will then be transformed into GOPAC America. More work will be done, and GOPAC Latin America will strive to promote engagement with civil society and international organizations within the region, such as the ParlAmericas, OAS, and others.

Hon. Shakeel Shabir, GOPAC Audit Committee, Chair APNAC Kenya

He firstly elaborated the basic mainstream understanding of democracy which extended into three arms of separation of power: the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary. Despite this separation of power concept, he stressed that parliament is the only branch of power that has been consistently and constantly evaluated through the election. Parliament is the conscious of the people, the people's choice, and the people's instrument in the government. Parliament is the oversight and meant to be working with the other two branches.

Over time, people expect great integrity in the parliament. It is a challenge. He raised an anecdote that these elected people are the people most liked in the beginning. But, after the first years, they will become the people's most hated persons. He presented an example in Kenya where almost 75% of parliamentary membership will be lost at every election. It shows that somewhere along the line, people do have a say.

Parliament must ensure that we carry ourselves with integrity. The worst corruption that parliamentarians come across is state capture. It is a condition when parliamentarians are captured by executives and sometimes by the activities of the judiciary. Sometimes by both of them. There is also a parliamentary budget control situation regarding the budget discussion.

He stressed the biggest problem parliamentarians now have budgetary corruption. The parliament and its members sometimes budget themselves for the next five years.

Therefore, the building blocks start with the parliament. Parliament must meet the demand of the people, and consequently, we must build with integrity even if it needs to be with the smallest team of parliamentarians. He expressed some disappointment where parliament still lacks recognition within the UN, notably at the Conference of the State Parties to UNCAC. He emphasized that parliamentarians must be a part of the UNCAC process. CoSP must invite parliamentarians at the same time they are inviting the executives and judiciary. It is important to ensure that the international community, the government, and the judiciary worldwide recognize the role of parliament, not just as part of a talk-shop but as an essential part of the UNCAC process. GOPAC has been influential and has become part of crucial and significant international issues on anti-corruption such as asset recovery, grand corruption, and others.

Mrs. Annika Wythes, Regional Anti-Corruption Advisor, UNODC Regional Office Southeast Asia and the Pacific

She began her presentation by quoting the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres regarding corruption: that corruption is not only a crime, but a moral and the ultimate betrayal of public trust. Parliamentarians have a strong voice and indeed must be heard.

Combating corruption has also been explicitly included in the SDGs through SDG16. It is both an outcome and enabler of sustainable development. Without justice and inclusion, the other SDGs will not be achieved.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parliamentarians play an essential role in safeguarding the complete package of COVID-19 relief. There is a need to have concise and action-oriented to address corruption.

In many parts and topics, she also elaborated some partnerships between the UNODC ROSEAP with GOPAC OCEANIA and SEAPAC. She also shortly briefed the current recognition of parliament in the UN through the COSP resolution 8/14.

Some of the work including the work in open information and the constituency development fund (CDF) reporting. She highlighted the need to have forward-looking people to be in the forefront of combatting corruption.

UNODC ROSEAP mobilizes and promotes regional and transnational cooperation to confront drugs, crime, terrorism, and corruption. The convergence of these issues threatens regional and global security. UNODC works directly with Governments, international organizations, and civil society, including media and the private sector.

She concluded her presentation by urging all participants to course correct, stop corruption and recover with integrity.

Mrs. Leilani Reklai, Pacific Anti-Corruption Journalists Network

As a former Governor and Palau legislator, she elaborated how information helps people be aware of what is going on in the public policy area. Media has a significant role in developing the people. The Pacific PACJN network explores ways to see how the media can educate journalists to better inform the people and provide better conditions for integrity.

She underlined that media took a great role in bringing information to the people. It also engages people to be involved in public policies. If people do not know what is going on, there will be no change. The media also create more awareness for the people to understand the forms of corruption that occur in their places. More importantly, the media can send a message to those corrupt persons that they are being watched.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Hon. Ouk Damry, GOPAC Cambodia,

Cambodia informed participants regarding Cambodia's efforts and its parliament in combatting corruption. The National Assembly has adopted several laws regarding anti-corruption promulgated in 2010. The Cambodian Parliament has also examined the draft law related to the anti-corruption law. Cambodia also set out the goals, in line with the global goals of sustainable development, with anti-corruption targets as follows: by 2030, Cambodia

must stop the flow of illicit financing, strengthen the demand and the return of illicit assets, fight against the crimes of bribery and all forms of corruption, establish accountability and transparency at institutions of all levels.

Mr. Ashley Emenike, Executive Director of GOPAC Nigeria

He introduced the newly established chapter of GOPAC in Nigeria. The organization is probably one of the GOPAC chapters and APNAC with the most ambitious program. He elaborated that GOPAC Nigeria has registered 32 out of 36 state chapters. Between now and June next year, GOPAC state chapters are mandated to register their institutions at the local government. It is essential to mainstream the work into the local communities.

GOPAC Nigeria is also part of the Nigerian Government Delegation. It is the second time involvement of GOPAC Nigeria as the national delegation. He reported that its senator has begun to introduce bills regarding anti-corruption, including the whistle-blower, money laundering probation act, etc. GOPAC Nigeria also carries out regular oversight on the anti-corruption institution.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dr. Nasser Al Sane, GOPAC Executive Committee Member at-Large, Chair ARPAC,

Dr. Al Sane concluded that there are so many best practices that we could learn from today's presentations. There will be more lessons to learn. But in the end, GOPAC does not stop at these shared experiences. GOPAC provides something at hand for the parliament and parliamentarians to develop themselves and upgrade their capacity to combat corruption.

GOPAC has tools, parliamentary manuals/guidelines on numerous issues, and they have been developed and, in some regional chapters, adapted to fit into the local context. He showcased some manuals that ARPAC develops, which can be useful for parliamentarians in their work and promoting anti-corruption work at the parliament level. He informed that GOPAC has numerous manuals/books/guidelines/handbooks to be used by parliamentarians, such as how parliamentarians can monitor UNCAC implementation, how parliamentarians can promote its oversight to check the country's revenue, and how parliamentarians can promote ethics values, etc.

Other chapters are on the same process to develop manuals. Our crucial lesson learned for today is that we need to work together. UNODC is also a good partner of GOPAC for nine years now. They are part of our manual technical support in developing the manual. We need to work together with other stakeholders, journalists, activists, and civil society groups. GOPAC's manuals are open for parliament/parliamentarians and can be freely used by others.