

Amplified speech to IACC Plenary 11 by John G. Williams MP, (Canada) Chair of GOPAC, Guatemala, Nov 16th, 2006
Prepared later from notes and not exactly as delivered.

Intro.

State for sale. Corruption and embedded networks of influence.

I think there can be no greater network of embedded influence around government than parliament, lobbyists, big business, labour, back room dealers, self appointed promoters of causes, and slick salesmen, all who want access to the government cash machine.

And that is just the democratic countries.

Add on war lords, drug lords, House of Lords, terrorists, blackmailers, smugglers, bribers, and other assorted scoundrels and you have a substantial number of disreputable people trying to beat down the government to get their hands on the power and the money.

And who is left? ... Oh yes, the poor taxpayer. Always the poor taxpayer. But he is not into state capture and theft of state assets because it is his money that is being stolen. And unfortunately it is being stolen; not before his eyes, but by secret deals hidden away and under the table.

Greased palms, wads of cash and expensive gifts behind closed doors, all to buy influence with the government that has patronage to hand out and taxpayers' money to spend.

A sordid situation indeed. So where does the answer lie? The answer lies in openness and transparency. Application of the rule of law. Proper accounting and auditing. Open and fair procurement policies, and that is just the start.

To sum it up, the solution lies in more and better governance, which leads to less and less corruption. Because good governance tackles corruption head on.

If good governance is in place, the people will not tolerate the pillaging of state assets that enrich the leaders and those who hang around them.

If good governance is in place, people will demand – and get – ethics and honesty in government.

If good governance is in place, leaders and their friends will be building their society, not building their secret bank accounts

So how do we develop good governance that not only promises so much, but actually delivers it too. The answer is in accountability. Leaders will deliver good governance when they know there will be a price for failure. Corruption can only be controlled, never eliminated. Every country, rich and poor, has corruption, the question is to what degree is it controlled, and it is controlled by accountability.

I define accountability as 'forces beyond one's control that cause one to think and act in a certain way.' It modifies behavior.

For example: I admit that I drive too fast. I always drive my car at ten kilometres over the speed limit. Why? Because I know I will get away with it. The police will not stop me for ten kilometres over the limit. But I do not drive 20, 30 or 40 kilometres over the speed limit since I know there is a good chance I will be caught and I will not like the price.

This tells me two things: if I think I will get away with it, I will do it. If I think I will be caught and I know I won't like the price, I will not do it. The same rules apply to leaders who steal billions from their country. If they think they will get away with it, they will do it, and if they think they will be caught and they know they won't like the price, they will not do it.

More concrete examples of accountability are, for example: in Canada we lost \$100 million in a corruption scandal. What happened? The government was defeated and some people went to jail. Not their preferred options, but forces beyond their control dictated the punishment. Let everyone see that there is a price to pay.

Last week, in the elections in the United States, the Administration were clearly told that their policies were unacceptable. A force beyond their control defeated the ruling party and took control of the Congress away from the President's party.

Look at Georgia and Ukraine. Both governments were heavily involved in corruption and one day the people said enough is enough. A force beyond their control said 'you are no longer the government.'

It is the responsibility of a democratic parliament to hold its executive accountable. To be that force beyond the control of the executive which says 'you will govern with integrity or someone else will do it instead.'

When parliament fails in its responsibility of oversight of government, government will fail; and when government fails, society fails. Therefore it is up to us. It is up to us as parliamentarians to be the foundation of accountability in our countries.

I explain democratic accountability using my 'hour glass' theory. We are all familiar with the standard triangle of an organisation. In a democracy, the people are at the bottom. They are served by a bureaucracy, who take direction from the cabinet who are appointed by the Prime Minister or the President. A standard triangle of an organisation which I call the service triangle.

However, above the service triangle, there is an inverted triangle which I call the governance triangle. The prime minister/president and cabinet report to parliament, who through an open and independent media is held accountable by the people. The people are at the top in charge of governance, and people are at the bottom as the ones being served.

But when parliament is removed from its place above the executive, and either becomes co-opted into corruption together with government, or is shunted off to the side, the people have lost their voice and capacity to hold government accountable.

Parliament, in a democracy, has four fundamental responsibilities:

- 1) To approve, amend or defeat, on behalf of the people, legislation proposed by the government.
- 2) To approve, amend or defeat, on behalf of the people, the budget proposed by the government, for it to raise through taxation the revenues needed to run the country.
- 3) To approve, amend or defeat, on behalf of the people, the estimates which are the line by line expenditures, giving the government authority to spend specified amounts on specific programs.
- 4) Government reports to and is accountable to Parliament.

Given these four responsibilities of parliament, it is easy to see that parliament should be in the driver's seat. A fact which I illustrated with the 'hour glass theory'.

In 2002, in the House of Commons in the Parliament of Canada, one hundred and seventy parliamentarians from around the world met to create the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC).

GOPAC has one mission; to make parliaments more effective as democratic institutions of oversight of government.

To achieve its objectives, GOPAC has three pillars or agendas:

- 1) Peer support to parliamentarians who are travelling the difficult and sometimes dangerous road of fighting corruption and to be an effective and credible voice to support them.
- 2) Education for parliamentarians. We send our young people to university to be lawyers, doctors, accountants and engineers but who teaches parliamentarians how to do their job of overseeing the work of government.
- 3) Leadership for results. Talk is not sufficient; it is time for parliamentarians to be recognised as leaders in the fight against corruption. Parliament has the constitutional authority and responsibility to hold its government accountable, therefore it is time we started fulfilling the mandate given to us by our electorate.

At the 2nd global conference in Arusha, Tanzania in September of 2006, GOPAC demonstrated its leadership for results by adopting resolutions calling for task forces to be created to advance eight specific agendas.

The resolutions and task-forces are summarized below:

1. **Code of Conduct for parliamentarians:** In many parts of the world parliamentarians are seen as a source of corruption, not a solution to it. In response to this perception, GOPAC will establish a global task force to develop a draft Code of Conduct for parliamentarians to be considered at the next global conference.
2. **Parliamentary Immunity:** Recognizing that parliamentary immunity is both essential to a well functioning democracy, but also seen in many jurisdictions as providing protection for corrupt parliamentarians, GOPAC will establish a global task force to develop a global assessment of parliamentary immunity and consult with chapters and members on proposals for consideration at the next global conference.
3. **Parliamentary Oversight:** Recognizing that effective parliamentary oversight is essential for good governance and combating corruption, GOPAC will establish a global task force to develop practical guidelines for parliamentarians on issues related to parliamentary oversight, and engage organizations with complementary interests, to develop educational materials for parliamentarians emphasizing the role and importance of parliamentary oversight.

4. **Access to Information and Media:** Access to information regarding state activities is severely limited in many countries. GOPAC will establish a global task force to gather information on successful experiences and best practices to assist in identifying ways to improve information accessibility and promote independence of the media where access to information and media are tightly controlled.
5. **International Conventions against Corruption:** Recognizing the importance of the UN Convention against Corruption in promoting international cooperation in combating corruption, GOPAC will establish a global task force to engage and motivate GOPAC chapters and parliamentarians through workshops and other means to advance the ratification and implementation of international conventions against corruption.
6. **Anti Money Laundering/Combating Terrorist Financing/Repatriation of Assets:** GOPAC will establish a global task force to push for stronger international regulations governing international financial transactions and will promote the work of key organizations in this field including the International Compliance Association, World Bank, IMF and FATF.
7. **Resource Revenue Transparency:** In many countries, the exploitation of natural resources and government corruption are inextricably linked. GOPAC will establish a task force of the Board to push for changes to international accounting standards for sovereign nations that will require the publishing in the Public Accounts, as a separate line item, all resource revenues received from resource extraction activities.
8. **Development Assistance Loans and Grants:** For development assistance to be effective it must be complemented by improved accountability and governance. GOPAC will establish a task force of the Board to impress upon all International Financial Institutions and official donors the need to include in their lending and grant agreements to sovereign states, governance provisions that ensure that parliaments are informed of the provisions of these agreements, the reporting on these agreements, and, where practical, engage parliamentarians in the approval process prior to concluding the agreements.

Each task force will be aligned with an expert agency to provide technical assistance and logistical support. We recognize that while GOPAC has political capacity, it needs the technical capacity of expert organizations to move complex agendas forward.

The time has come for parliamentarians to be engaged. Transparency International has just published another edition of its perception index of corruption. There is clearly an inverse relationship between democratic governance and corruption. More democracy, less corruption.

GOPAC is for those who believe in honesty, ethics and integrity. GOPAC is for those who believe in parliamentary oversight and accountability. Openness and transparency should be the order of the day.

GOPAC is for those who say, it is our obligation to serve our society, not to help ourselves.

Strong leaders can only be constrained by strong institutions. The strongest institution in any country should be its parliament. Only parliament has the constitutional authority and responsibility to hold government to account. Through GOPAC there is an opportunity to engage individual parliamentarians to strengthen parliament so that we can start delivering accountability to our governments and prosperity to our people.

Nobody voted for the state being sold out from under them. Nobody voted to give the leaders and their friends unfettered access to clean out the treasury.

Nobody voted for poverty, illiteracy, disease, squalid living conditions, preventable infant mortality, no clean water, no jobs and no hope, all of which are the by products of grand corruption and the theft of state assets.

So why does government keep getting away with the cash? The answer is simple... no openness, no transparency, no governance, no accountability.

So I say to the parliamentarians in the room ... are we going to do something to stop all this? Or are we going to sit back, do nothing and abdicate our responsibility to those who voted for us and put their hope in us? The choice is ours and I think the answer is clear!