

IPU 143rd Assembly and Related Meetings

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IFEMA Palacio Municipal, Madrid, Spain

GENERAL DEBATE SPEECH***“Contemporary Challenges to Democracy:
Overcoming Division and Building Community”*****Hon. Dr. Fadli Zon**

GOPAC Vice Chair & SEAPAC President

Chair of the Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, The Indonesian
House of Representatives

*Honourable Chair,
Excellencies Speakers and Members of Parliaments,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen.*

Among numerous contemporary challenges facing our democracy today, severe polarization could be one of the most destructive, as it profoundly damages all institutions essential to democracy. Once a society becomes deeply divided, it would be very difficult to heal. Devising remedial actions on such challenge requires a deep understanding on why this problem is so difficult to overcome.

From the widening gaps and escalating socio-economic inequality, to the malicious political discourse and disinformation which generates echo chambers in the digital and social media space, the causes of this great divide are prevalent and self-perpetuating. But I want to highlight one important root cause: Rampant and entrenched corruption.

In 2012, the legislative guide for the implementation of UN Convention against Corruption has made it clear that corruption induces many long-term effects, including social polarization. It fuels grievances and erodes public trust towards the democratic processes. As much as \$2.6 trillion, or 5% of global GDP, has lost to corruption annually; undermining not only the economic growth, but also the social cohesion.

The clientelistic structures within a corrupt governance also worsen economic inequality and divide society. This should be a case of our collective concern, as it could perpetuate discontent towards democratic governance and fragility among members of society.

Corruption is also a huge barrier in achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Around 30% of development aids worldwide has been corrupted. Studies have shown that the poor pay the highest percentage of their income in bribes. The unequal development caused by corruption will only aggravate the wealth division, widen the gap between the rich and the most marginalized.

Distinguished delegates,

Fighting corruption means healing divisions. Ensuring the transparent and accountable governance symbolizes the commitment in building a better society. Parliaments must be at the center of the struggle to attain and sustain good governance, to better address the complex challenges of democracy.

GOPAC, in this regard, is a distinctive platform for parliamentarians to work together, collaborate, and advocate means to combat corruption and advance good governance at the global level.

One of our focuses is to promote a more robust legislative openness framework. An open parliament is essential to guarantee transparency and counteract the divisive effects of disinformation by assuring accountability. Through this forum, I call upon parliaments to adopt legislation to guarantee the right to public information, and promote proactive disclosure of parliamentary information to encourage evidence-based public debates.

Through the Global Task Force on Participation of Society, GOPAC encourages those who are affected by public decisions to be involved in the decision-making process. We push for a more comprehensive review on the impacts experienced by minorities and the most vulnerable, so that the policies will not exacerbate their exclusion and marginalization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fighting corruption is in-line with tackling the underlying democratic challenges. The efforts must consider a multifaceted strategy – not only in passing and enforcing anti-corruption legislation, but also by strengthening wider political accountability, increasing participation, and championing openness initiatives. These reforms will strengthen fundamental principles for democracy.

To this end, GOPAC is eager to facilitate information exchange, provide knowledge products, share best practices between our more than 1.200 members worldwide, as well as engage in the peer review and reciprocal learning across regions. On behalf of GOPAC, I hereby extend our gratitude for supports that have been given by some parliaments during their chairmanship, including the Parliaments of Qatar and Indonesia.

As a final message, I call upon all the esteemed members of the IPU to collectively strengthen our commitment in combating corruption. Do not let it leads our society to the decline of democracy.

Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Fadli Zon

Vice Chair, GOPAC

President, SEAPAC

*Chairperson, Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation,
the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia*