



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Opening remarks by Mr. Duarte Pacheco, IPU President

2021 Parliamentary Hearing

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Thank you, President Bozkir, for your kind words, and for your leadership,

And thank you, Naomi, for your wonderful statement, which strikes deep into our hearts.

Dear colleagues,

The Parliamentary Hearing organized with the UN it is one of the most important events in our program of activities, because we think that their collaboration is essential both to the UN and to the IPU. To the UN because it will bring light to the perspective of parliamentarians about important issues. To the IPU because we will strengthen our links with the UN and analyze the matters that affect all nations. So we decided to keep this hearing in our program. It is not possible to have an in-person meeting, but we will do it virtually, and we hope that next year it will be possible to meet again in New York.

The Parliamentary Hearing of this year is about an issue that must be central to our work as parliamentarians.

Corruption is one of the cancers to democracy.

Like cancer, it starts slowly and in silence, one little step at a time, until a major organ stops working and the whole *body politic* is compromised.

Fortunately, corruption can be fought effectively almost everywhere, and we know how to do this.

The 2005 UN Convention Against Corruption gives us plenty of guidance. We just need to master the political will to implement it all the way.

This requires legislation and it requires resources to enforce laws that would otherwise remain inside our books.

Globally, the financial losses due to corruption amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars a year.

Maybe more than official aid – about \$140 billion annually.

The Sustainable Development Goals would be much farther ahead today if that money could be recovered and put to good use, investing in universal health care, education and social safety net, for example.

Even the response to the current terrible pandemic might have been much stronger in some countries if public resources had not disappeared.

Imagine how it must feel to have to pay a bribe to some public official to get a business license, so you can earn a living.

Imagine how a good business owner must feel when a procurement contract she was bidding for is awarded to a less qualified company because a bribe was paid.

Imagine how corruption affects women when their own bodies become the currency in which a bribe must be paid.

Imagine the damage done to a society when people sense that some of their elected representatives are on the take.

It is because of such real-life scenarios that corruption is highlighted in the SDGs.

SDG 16, the governance goal, includes a specific target that calls on governments to “substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms” by 2030.

Implicit in this wording is the idea that corruption, like most other crimes, cannot be eliminated altogether. But yes, it can be contained and reduced to no more than an occasional event.

As serious and complicated as this issue remains, make no mistake: fundamentally, the world is better off today than only twenty years ago, when the first steps of the UN convention were taken.

Before the convention, many acts of corruption did not even figure in criminal codes. In many places, it was even possible for companies to get a tax deduction for bribes paid to foreign actors.

The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, GOPAC, was created in 2002.

We believe very much in this network - whose current Chair, Speaker Al Mahmoud of Qatar, will speak later this morning - for facilitating the ratification of the convention by parliaments around the world and for keeping the pressure on them – on all of us - to do more and better to implement the convention.

I hope by the time this meeting is over tomorrow we will all feel with more energy in our anti-corruption efforts.

Dear Friends, this meeting is a great opportunity for us to join the voice of parliaments to the Political Declaration that the UN General Assembly will adopt in June.

Let's make the most of it.

Thank you.