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Executive Director, Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption

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## How Do We Fight Corruption?

Posted: 06/17/2013 5:30 pm

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During our 10-hour flight, my seatmate told me that he was travelling to Brasilia on a pilgrimage to meet the faith healer "John of God," hoping for a cure for his daughter's Parkinson's disease. I replied that I was travelling to address the International Anti-Corruption Conference, hoping to build a consensus amongst parliamentarians and global institutions to use international law to fight political corruption.

My seatmate looked at me with an air of sympathy and scepticism. To him, I was

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obviously the one chasing an improbable miracle.

We live in an age of dire cynicism about corruption in politics. Nearly three-quarters of Canadians surveyed for [Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer](#) judged their government's efforts against corruption to be "ineffective." By this measure, Canadians have a lower opinion of their own government's commitment to public integrity than do Pakistanis, Iraqis, and Nigerians.

Events since that survey have done little to improve the standing of Canada's governing class.

Quebec's Charbonneau Commission has revealed an orgy of bribery, influence peddling, and organised crime in the corridors of power. The Prime Minister's Chief of Staff has resigned and multiple Senators have been driven from their caucuses by the expenses scandal. Montreal has seen one Mayor flee office, and his replacement led away in handcuffs.

Globally, the consequences of political corruption almost defy understanding.

The World Bank estimates that more than \$1 trillion are paid in bribes every year, the largest of which are to obtain state contracts and monopolies. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that multinational criminality moves \$2.1 trillion per year across borders, enabled by the active collusion or passive inattention of regulators. The Tax Justice Network estimates that governments lose \$3.1 trillion per year because of tax evasion, disproportionately by those with the resources to sway policy makers or public servants.

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By comparison, meeting the much-vaunted Millennium Development Goals -- eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, establishing universal primary education, reducing child mortality by two-thirds, reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters, halting the spread of HIV and malaria, halving the proportion of people without access to clean water and sanitation, and promoting gender equality in schools and the workforce -- would cost no more than \$481 billion in development.

What the world loses to corruption in a single year would be enough to end the worst forms of human misery and transform human civilization, at least a dozen times over.

Political corruption robs citizens of our own resources, our fundamental rights, and our very identities as members of a free and equal society. It makes the weak prey to the strong, and delivers control of society into the hands of the unjust. It debilitates the nation, undermines the rule of law, and rots public confidence in democracy. It is a crime against hope itself.

Corruption takes many forms: the theft of public resources; the sale of political influence; the betrayal of the public trust. In all cases, however, corruption thrives when political power is able to operate in the shadows, and it withers before the glare of public scrutiny.

The solution to corruption is therefore extraordinarily simple to describe, though fiendishly difficult to achieve: a vigilant, relentless, and fearless community of citizens and parliamentarians, standing together between our leaders and the levers of power.

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. It is a perception that is too often justified, but it is a perception that is just as often desperately unfair.

There are parliamentarians around the world who risk their lives every day to speak for those who would otherwise have no voice. There are parliamentarians who tilt at the powerful for no better reason than to shield others. There are still parliamentarians who understand that election to office is not a licence to rule, but a contract to serve.

My work with the [Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption](#) is inspired



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by the conviction that the fight against political corruption is the mandate of our age. But ultimately, I know that our efforts can only succeed if we inspire cynical citizens to believe that the political process can be part of the solution, not only part of the problem; if we stir courage in timorous legislators to stare down those who know no restraint; and if we convince both groups that together, we can achieve the victory over corruption that none of us can reach alone.

*Akaash Maharaj is Executive Director of the [Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption](#). His personal web site is [www.Maharaj.org](http://www.Maharaj.org).*

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**Brian Rushfeldt**

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4 minutes ago ( 3:45 PM)

three things come to mind in answer to your question:

- 1) when being a public servant is financially lucrative it will draw people who are in it for themselves not the public and country. So perhaps some perks shud be stopped and rules tightened.
- 2) when there seems to be no legal consequences for dishonesty and sometime even criminal actions of public servants it breeds corruption. e.g: if I claimed money I should not have claimed from a private company I would not just be told pay it back - charges would have proceeded.
- 3) we as Canadians need to start to do character checks on wanna be elected officials - we need to see who these people really are - do they have an honorable and noble past?

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**Tony Kondaks**

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24 minutes ago ( 3:25 PM)

I wonder whether crony capitalism and crony socialism fall under the umbrella of "political corruption." Not technically "illegal" but equally immoral.

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**Dragonfly78**

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4 hours ago (12:14 PM)

The only way to get rid of corruption is to get rid of people and i dont see that anytime soon, with a population of 7Billion plus...and the worst corrupt mofos are at the top...not all but most of them.

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**Akaash Maharaj**

*Global Org of Parliamentarians Against Corruption*

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2 hours ago ( 1:50 PM)

I agree that there is no hope of eliminating corruption without fundamentally changing human nature, which will certainly not happen any time soon.

However, there are many things we can do to reduce corruption, by working with rather than against human nature

Legislative oversight, checks and balances, and independent law enforcement do not rely upon people being angels. Instead, they function as elements of systems where corruption is restrained by everyone monitoring everyone else in the pursuit of his own self interests.

We can not hope to make tomorrow perfect, but we can certainly make it better than yesterday.

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**Vega509**

*Orwell was right .....*

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5 hours ago (11:09 AM)

Corruption can never be eliminated as long as the corrupt are in power.

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*Global Org of Parliamentarians Against Corruption*

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2 hours ago ( 1:38 PM)

Power and corruption have walked together since before the days of organised societies: power tends to corrupt and the corrupt tend to seek power. Hoping for a day when corruption will end because power is only wielded by honourable people is, I fear, a fantasy.

We can, however, reduce and minimise corruption by creating systems of vigilant oversight, where those in power know that they are being scrutinised and will face meaningful consequences if they stray into corrupt practices.

I meant it sincerely when I wrote that corruption thrives when political power is able to operate in the shadows, but that it withers before the glare of public scrutiny.

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**Steve Lives**

*The Venus Project ... look it up*

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19 hours ago ( 9:12 PM)

The solution to corruption is to get rid of the root cause of it. And the root cause is money, honey. We need to redesign how our societies work, with intelligence and the application of science and technology. So, how do we rid ourselves of money? Well, I guess you have to understand why money exists in the first place. Money is based on scarcity. The rarer something is, the more value

it has. Or at least that is the perception most people have. There is also the labor for money scheme to account for, but that is also solved in the solution. So to get rid of monetary systems, we have to create a system of abundance. And with the technology in existence today, it wouldn't be that hard. But we would also have to accept that all the worlds resources are the common heritage of all the worlds people. I could go on, but I don't have the time or space here to do so. If you are interested in what I'm talking about, check out the Venus Project. They call it a Resource Based Economy.

You will never, ever, get rid of corruption tinkering in the box we have created. A system of self interest, which is what we live in, will always result in the many problems we see today. Starvation, crime, war, deprivation, social stratification, will continue as long as we ignore the rotten foundations of our societies.

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17 hours ago (11:07 PM)

I must admit that it made me smile to see that the Venus Project web sites features a book extolling their philosophy, entitled The Best That Money Can't Buy, which they are selling for \$24.95.

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**

**Steve Lives**

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9 hours ago ( 6:27 AM)

Hey, we still live in a world that requires people to attain money to survive. Don't dismiss what they are talking about for something as shallow as that. If you want to live in a world that is at peace, this is what has to be done. Anything less will result in the continuation of the way it is today. But you go to your meetings, and lets see what has changed in 10 years. My money is on 0.

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**Kevin55**

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20 hours ago ( 7:46 PM)

We can never rid ourselves of corruption. We can only identify it and try to prevent it. So long as there are people of little principle, lazy, inept and plain stupid corruption will flourish.

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