

Youths in Combating Corruption

by Mei Hwa Wong, TI-Malaysia's Youth Representative and Participant of TI'S International Youth Camp (IYC) 2015

On the 4th January 2015 - 10th January 2015, youth representatives from 7 Transparency International chapters (Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Vietnam) came together for one common passion: to fight against corruption for our future generations. The camp was held at a Teacher's Training College in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Participating in this camp was a very eye-opening experience for me because I witnessed the passion and burning desire of every youth towards combatting one of the biggest issues almost every country is facing: corruption.

Before I get into the technical details, my experience in Siem Reap was amazing. As part of a team building exercise, we cycled approximately 20km around Angkor Wat and other Angkor temples. I was so mesmerized by the beautiful architecture and carvings of the entire Wat, and the activity helped to build bonds with the other participants, which was great preparation for the following four days. The cycling experience was definitely one of the highlights of my visit.

Besides getting to visit Angkor Wat, another authentic experience that got me excited was having the opportunity to stay in a real tent and take part in the symbolic lighting of the campfire as part of the opening ceremony, together with the other delegates. I also had the chance to watch and experience the cultural performances by youth from the six other countries, which was a great insight for me.

Alongside these cultural experiences, we were involved in numerous workshop sessions involving the guest speakers, group discussions and brainstorming initiatives which were a crucial capacity building experience, as I was amazed by our capability to get things done within a limited period of time. All the sessions were very productive because each field covered a wide array of content, such as human rights or the United Nations Convention Against Corruption as well as getting direct insight from a member of the Global Youth Anti-Corruption Network and the advocacy activities they have implemented. This provided us with practical insight on how we can combat corruption in our country. The energy levels, enthusiasm and passion of the speakers were extremely inspiring, and helped to significantly motivate us as Youth, and exemplify the impact our role can have.

A significant message I took away from this camp was that corruption is something that can happen to anyone at any time. It can be something that can occur obliviously, where a person is not aware that he or she is committing corruption. This was very well portrayed through the task which was given by one of our guest speakers, Joel Barredo, a representative from the ASEAN Youth Network. As a group of 40 youth we were asked to take care of six eggs over an 18 hour period. Two groups were responsible and accountable for the eggs welfare, whilst four people were secretly assigned to steal the eggs. It was not until we were supposed to present the six eggs back to Joel, that our group realized that all of our eggs were gone. The four people who were assigned to steal our eggs were part of our own team which we were not aware of. We had just been warned to be vigilant of potential thieves. We had not

strategized carefully enough to ensure our property would not be stolen from those that were part of our own group. This exercise perfectly exemplified what is seen and experienced during corruption.

Experiencing this first hand, has provided me with a bigger urge to really do something for my country and contribute towards combating corruption, because I want to see a better future for Malaysia. Throughout the sessions, one thing that most speakers and the organisers stressed regular during each crucial discussion was to not hate the person that has committed corruption, but hate the process. I believe this message is really powerful and is a strong message we should all live by. In some cases, some issues pertaining to corruption are still left unresolved due to the manifestation of hatred and blame, when the root of the issue is overlooked. Instead, I learnt more effort needs to be made in educating people and future generations in combating corruption. It is better to educate our younger generations on the negative effects of corruption rather than creating negativity and develop hatred in a child towards a person that has committed corruption. It is always the best choice to choose the non-violent way to combat corruption.

Through this camp, each youth participant contributed towards helping me see what I can do for my country. After listening to the problems other youth experience in their home country, I was taken aback. I realised that some countries had it worse than Malaysia and the only advice I can give to most people out there is be grateful because the effects of corruption could be exceedingly worse. However, this does not stop me or discourage me from helping my country in improving. We just have to take action!

I was very happy to work with our lovely focal person, Jessica, who has been such an amazing mentor and supporter in helping us with developing our in-country initiative. I am also very thankful to the two other Malaysian youth representatives, Ken and Nicholas for their great insight and perspectives on corruption, and I loved working with them in developing our in-country initiative! The organisers of the camp were amazing in preparing a well-run camp and overall experience. All in all, it was indeed a good experience and a great way to start my 2015. Now, I can't wait to launch our in-country initiative and the joint initiative with my new found anti-corruption fighters, of which we make the 'Youth Movement for Transparency-Asia' (YMT-A).