

International Visitor Report

What do West Africa, Indonesia, Belarus, and Nigeria have in common? The answer is Judicial Watch. Representatives from each of those countries joined with a growing number of international delegations who have visited Judicial Watch over the past four years. They are interested in learning firsthand about the grassroots-operation of a highly successful nonprofit organization, funded primarily by the private donations of American citizens.¹

There is another thread of commonality that runs through these countries from which America is not immune. That thread is “corruption,” and it is the *raison d’etre* for Judicial Watch’s creation and a fairly certain guarantee of its future.

The international visitors presently hold positions of influence within their government and communities. They have all been keenly interested in finding ways to imitate and incorporate those practices found in political organizations in America that serve to expose and uproot government corruption. It is not a job for the weak-kneed or faint-hearted. Although we know what it takes to stand against the powerful in government, we truly do not fully appreciate the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that many of our visitors face.

West Africa

President Tom Fitton met with the African regional group in April to discuss how Judicial Watch, a non-governmental organization, monitors government activities.

The development of non-governmental citizen watchdog groups as a means to the development of civil society in underdeveloped nations is a concept that has recently “come of age.” At a recent Senior Fellow Project Report presentation, sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace on “Conflict and Democracy in Africa,” Senior Fellow Daniel Chirot proposed an innovative alternative for the transfer of U.S. aid dollars that, he believes, could quicken the process of development in Africa and bring an end to the cycle of corruption and violence. It is the development of citizen groups that are far removed from the centers of power, but are positioned to exert pressure on those centers for the betterment of society as a whole.

Today, in Africa, the future does not bode well for the majority of its citizens unless it can find ways to stop the continuing cycle of corruption. Corruption breeds poverty and poverty, disease. In most regions of Africa, there is an excess mortality rate due to the scourge of AIDS. Even absent the AIDS epidemic, the average life expectancy of its citizens today is no more than 49 years (Rwanda: 39 years; Senegal: 57 years).²

Indonesian

In April, President Tom Fitton met with Indonesian delegate, Mr. Elfenda Ananda. The legal challenges involved in the Cheney Energy Task Force case were discussed to illustrate how groups such as ours can have an impact even on those who sit at the helm of state. And more importantly, to demonstrate that it is the exercise of our citizen rights and responsibilities—“the process”—that roots out corruption and keeps the system running as America’s Founding Fathers intended.

Belarus

In May, Judicial Watch's director of research and investigations, Chris Farrell, attorney Jim Peterson, and paralegal Cristina Rotaru met with the Belarus delegation. The delegation was composed of five lawyers, who were leaders of organizations that appear very similar to pressure groups and NGOs in America. Their organizations are dedicated to the promotion of legal, civil, and human rights.

Belarus maintains close political and economic ties to Russia, which it also borders. It remains today a dictatorship, although it refers to itself as a republic.³ President Bush, during a recent visit to the continent, referred to Belarus as the "last dictatorship" in Europe.⁴ The hope and promise of democratic reform in Belarus is found in the rise of its grassroots movements, such as those represented by the Belarus delegation.

Nigeria

President Tom Fitton also met with a group of Nigerian journalists in May for a taped interview on the role of citizen watchdog groups and the affect they have on government transparency. This is one of the most recent media interviews he has conducted with international journalists over the past few years. He has previously met with journalists from Moldova, Brazil, and Japan—groups as disparate politically as they are geographically.

Judicial Watch is considered one of the most effective watchdog groups in the nation. It is now being recognized by countries who share a much different political landscape. The irony is that the success of watchdog groups in America is the best evidence of a healthy political system. It is a testament to the principles espoused in the U.S. Constitution. America is alive and well and it is becoming, as Ronald Reagan envisioned, "that shining city on a hill."

Janice Rurup is the author of the International Visitor Reports and serves as Special Assistant to the President for Judicial Watch.

¹ The international visitors are hosted by various leadership programs through the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of State.

² CIA - The World Factbook, 2005 <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>> (May 2005).

³ CIA - The World Factbook, 2005 <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>> (May 2005).

⁴ President George W. Bush, "President Discusses Freedom and Democracy in Latvia," 5/7/2005 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/05/print/20050507-8.html>> (May 2005).