My name is Vijay Anand, and am President of 5th Pillar, a citizens' coalition against corruption in India. 5th Pillar's objective is to enable and empower every citizen to seek transparency and accountability in governance, catalyze civic participation, facilitate the right to information, all in an effort to curb corruption. The great digital divide in how information is accessed and used in urban vs. rural India has required adoption of a multi-pronged approach. The mission statement of 5th Pillar “Encourage, Enable and Empower Every Citizen of India to Eliminate Corruption” is best understood when placed in the context of the organization’s grass-roots level anti-corruption initiatives, especially targeted at children in schools, youth in colleges and the villagers of rural India. The ZERO RUPEE NOTE, which has been our primary campaign tool to take our anti-corruption message to every nook and corner of India, has served as a powerful but non-violent weapon of non-cooperation against corruption and bribery. It has served as a connecting fiber among like-minded anti-corruption organizations, whistleblowers and simply citizens who wanted to say NO to bribes without having to spell it out in too many words.

The Right to Information Act, passed by the Indian Parliament in 2005, mandates timely response to citizens requests on various aspects of public information with respect to the government's functioning. 5th Pillar’s RTI awareness program empowers citizens through training programs and workshops on effective use of the “RTI Act”. Citizens use it largely to obtain their rights and avail of their basic services including Ration card, Driving license, Old Age pension, Land ownership title etc. On top of this, the RTI Act has also equipped many a citizen inclined towards the public interest, to derive information on government spending, completion of civic amenity projects, and also move closer to a more transparent and accountable government machinery. 5th Pillar runs all-day Right to Information clinics and conducts weekly training programs in many of its offices and chapters in India.

India has the second largest and youngest population in the world, with more than 600 million Indians below the age of 35. With the belief that the Indian Youth are best positioned to effect systemic change, 5th Pillar launched the “Freedom from Corruption” campaign consisting of training programs in schools and colleges to inculcate values based on ethics and integrity in young Indian minds ready to venture out in the real world as responsible young adults. Launched in 2007, to date
the program has been carried out in over 1600 colleges and schools reaching over 1,000,000 young Indians in 6 years, all of who have jointly pledged with their peers and teachers "I PROMISE TO NEITHER ACCEPT NOR GIVE BRIBE".

At this juncture, I would like to note that the ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption by India, last May 2012, is a major milestone in India's fight against corruption. For a country as vast and populous as India is, the UNCAC's ratification and the implementation thereafter become very critical for the nation's progress in the key areas of education, health care and infrastructure.

An independent anti-corruption agency has been a long awaited dream for India, especially with numerous political parties and the political culture deeply rooted in corruption, which doesn't allow the existing anti-Corruption agencies to operate autonomously. The day anti-corruption agencies are independent from the political and the governmental sphere, accountability and transparency in government functioning is bound to increase.

A strong Whistleblowers Act is the need of the hour for countries in the South Asian region, to instill the confidence in the honest and courageous public officials and citizens at large to do their duty to their respective nations to guard their people's money and make it available for them as opposed to helplessly watch huge sums of money taking flight from their country to tax havens, where from retrieval becomes a mammoth task again.

Engagement of the civil society organizations in the recent times in the implementation process, especially in the areas of review mechanisms, is a great way to take advantage of willing groups and agencies who already have taken interest in anti-Corruption and demonstrated their mettle in the fight against corruption in their respective geographies. On behalf of everyone at 5th Pillar from India, we thank the UNODC for moving in that direction to involve CSOs in that part of the process.