

Irina Bokova
Director General
UNESCO

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Via email: i.bokova@unesco.org

CC: Getachew Engida, Deputy Director General (g.engida@unesco.org)

Eric Falt, Assistant Director General for External Relations (e.falt@unesco.org)

Frank la Rue, Assistant Director General for Communication and Information (f.la-rue@unesco.org)

Dear Irina Bokova,

We are writing to you as organisations and individuals working on the right to information, i.e. the right to access information held by public bodies. This has been clearly recognised as a human right under international law, as well as in all three regional systems for human rights in Africa, the Americas and Europe.

We believe that, just as States need to adopt laws to give effect to this right, inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) also need to adopt right to information policies. This flows from the obligation of IGOs to respect human rights guarantees, as well as the benefits that flow from transparency, including building public trust, combating corruption and mismanagement, and fostering democratic engagement and accountability. We are, therefore, pleased to hear that UNESCO is currently developing an access to information policy. This follows developments at a number of other IGOs and is clearly better practice.

We would, at the same time, like to highlight the cardinal importance of engaging in genuine consultations with external stakeholders as part of the process of developing a policy in this area. Such consultations are important for a number of reasons, including to ensure that the final policy reflects the concerns of those for whose benefit it has been developed and to take advantage of the considerable expertise that exists globally on this issue. For such a consultation to be genuine, it must take place early enough in the policy development cycle for the comments received during the consultation to be reflected in the final policy.

We therefore urge UNESCO to release a draft version of its access to information policy as soon as possible rather than trying to reach consensus internally before releasing it, at which point the document would be unduly 'fixed' or final for the consultation to be genuine. We, in turn, commit to engaging fulsomely during the consultation process with a view to ensuring that the final policy is as robust as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Organisations

1. Access Info Europe, Spain
2. Access Now, United States
3. Access to Information Programme, Bulgaria
4. Advocacy Academy of Timisoara, Romania
5. Advocacy and Policy Institute, Cambodia
6. Africa Freedom of Information Centre, Uganda
7. AfroLeadership, Cameroon
8. Alianza Regional por la Libre Expresión e Información, the Americas
9. ARTICLE 19, United Kingdom
10. Asociación Nacional de la Prensa, ANP, Bolivia
11. Asociación por los Derechos Civiles, ADC, Argentina
12. Cainfo, Uruguay
13. Cameroon FOIA Coalition Voice
14. Campaign for Freedom of Information, United Kingdom
15. Carter Center, United States
16. Center for Independent Journalism, Romania
17. Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law, Ukraine
18. Centre for Law and Democracy, Canada
19. Centre for Media Freedom, Morocco
20. Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, Pakistan
21. Citizens' Campaign for Right to Information, Nepal
22. Code for Croatia
23. COLLECITF 24, Democratic Republic of Congo
24. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, India
25. DATA Uruguay
26. Directorio Legislativo, Argentina
27. Diritto Di Sapere, Italy
28. Espacio Público, Venezuela
29. Forum Informationsfreiheit, Austria
30. Foundation Open Society - Macedonia
31. Freedom of Information Center, Armenia
32. Fundación Democracia sin Fronteras, Honduras
33. Fundación Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, Nicaragua
34. Fundamedios, Ecuador
35. Fundar, Mexico
36. Fusades, El Salvador
37. Global Forum for Media Development, Belgium
38. GONG, Croatia
39. Hungarian Civil Liberties Union/Társaság a Szabadságjogokért
40. Info House Slovenia
41. Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development, Pakistan
42. Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental, IDEA, Paraguay
43. Integrity Action, United Kingdom
44. Lex Entrepreneur, Nigeria
45. Life Line to Citizen, India

46. Moroccan Access to Information Network
47. n-ost, Germany
48. National Campaign for People's Right to Information, India
49. Open Knowledge Foundation Germany
50. Open Society Foundation, Serbia
51. Palestinian Center For Development & Media Freedoms, MADA, Palestine
52. Privacy and Access Council of Canada — Conseil du Canada de l'Accès et la vie Privée
53. PRO MEDIA, Macedonia
54. Research Initiatives, Bangladesh
55. Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association, Canada
56. Satark Nagrik Sangathan, India
57. Transparencia por Colombia, Colombia
58. Transparency International

Individuals

1. Muhammad Aftab Alam, Legal Expert, Media Law and RTI, Pakistan
2. Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Information Commissioner Punjab, Pakistan
3. Linda Austere, RTI Activist
4. Staffan Dahllöf, Freelance Journalist, Denmark
5. Dr. Fatima Diallo, Academic, Senegal
6. Shushan Doydoyan, RTI Expert, Armenia
7. Said Essoulami, Morocco
8. Francesca Fanucci, Lawyer - Consultant on Freedom of Expression, United Kingdom
9. Dr. David Goldberg, Director Project Forsskal, United Kingdom
10. Dwight Hines, Ph.D., United States
11. Gabriela Edith Morales Martínez, Specialist on Access to Information and Accountability, Mexico
12. Lourdes Morales, Accountability Network, Mexico
13. Venkatesh Nayak, RTI Activist, India
14. Sharon Polsky MAPP, Privacy & Access-to-Information Advocate, Canada
15. Dr. Jeannine Relly, The University of Arizona, United States
16. Dr. Andrew Scott, Associate Professor, LSE, London
17. Yahia Shukkeir, Media Expert and RTI Activist, Jordan
18. Santosh Sigdel, RTI Activist, Nepal
19. Peter Timmins, Lawyer, Open and Shut, Australia
20. Professor Kalim Ullah, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Commission, Pakistan
21. Roger Vleugels, Legal Advisor and FOI Lecturer, the Netherlands
22. Dirk Voorhoof, Human Rights Centre, Ghent University, Belgium
23. Dr. Mark Weiler, Librarian, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada