



Africa Freedom of Information Centre

AFIC

Statement to African Heads of State and Government

Access to Information Central to Improving Maternal, Child and Infant Development in Africa

July 15, 2010, Kampala Uganda

Your Excellencies;

The Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) a pan-African nongovernmental organization promoting the right of access to information in Africa and other civil society organizations listed below are pleased that the 15th African Union Summit will convene in Kampala from July 19-27, 2010 under the theme, “Maternal, Infant and Child Health and Development in Africa”.

Maternal, infant and child health are among Africa’s most challenging health problems. 47% of global maternal deaths take place in Africa with the highest rate in Sub-Saharan countries. 85% of all maternal deaths are direct results of complications arising during pregnancy and delivery. The majority (60%) of the mothers deliver at home, largely in rural areas without skilled attendance. Child and infant deaths are disturbing. As many as 200 of every a thousand live born infants in Africa die before their first birthdays.

Despite increased health expenditure by African governments, utilization of health services at public facilities has remained as low as 23% in some countries with the rest of the population seeking treatment elsewhere (33% go to community health workers), 17% from private clinics and 3% home/self medication).

Information is power. Experiences in Uganda in 1996 revealed that by publishing school grants in news papers, the proportion of funds released by the Ministry of Finance reaching schools increased from 20% to 80%, a strong link between access to information and leakages. Furthermore, by providing information about public services such as staffing levels, opening and closing hours, services offered, payments required, what services to expect from service providers and role of citizens in running the services, people gain ownership and utilize services made available by governments. Access to relevant and factual information will also empower women to exercise their right to maternal health. This mechanism would provide a platform for mothers and other community members who form the largest part of care givers to participate in addressing common facility challenges such as chronic shortage of medicines and absenteeism occasioned by theft and mismanagement. These actions could significantly improve the health of mothers, infants and children.

Access to Information is at the heart of human development and realization of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly states that: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold*

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opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Further, Article 19 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance as well as Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Declaration of the Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, the Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Information stress the importance of information in advancing Economic and Social Rights (ESR) and development.

The Carter Center and the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa convened a meeting in Accra, Ghana in February 2010 at which senior government leaders, civil society organizations, international bodies, donor agencies, the private sector, media outlets and scholars came up with Regional Findings and Plan of Action for the Advancement of the Right of Access to Information. We urge leaders to facilitate the study and implementation of the plan of action.

African leaders and governments have it in their power to address maternal, child and infant deaths by enabling access to information. In this regard, AFIC together with civil society organizations listed below urge leaders attending the 15th Summit of the African Union to:

1. Consider a specific declaration on access to information
2. Consider adoption of an Africa wide access to information instrument that commits member states to guarantee and afford citizens the right to information
3. Adopt access to information national legislations to guarantee the right to information and guide citizens on how they can request and receive information held by public bodies.
4. In the case of Uganda, Angola, South Africa and Ethiopia where national Governments have adopted access to information laws, efforts on implementation should be strengthened
5. Countries like Zimbabwe whose legislation restrict rather than facilitate freedom of information to repeal them and enact progressive ones.
6. Elections are at the heart of accountability and good governance. African Governments are urged to expedite the ratification and implementation of instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, elections and Governance adopted by the African Union in January 2007
7. In countries such as Zambia and Kenya where constitutional reforms are under the way, the right to information should be guaranteed in the constitution.

Civil society organisations listed below are convinced that by making access to information a reality, health services will be more accessible and affordable which will in turn improve maternal, infant and child health.

1. Africa Freedom of Information Centre, Kampala, Uganda
2. Centre for Law and Democracy, Halifax, Canada.
3. FAMEDEV-Inter Africa Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development/Le Réseau Inter Africain pour les Femmes, Média, Genre et Développement, Dakar, Sénégal.
4. Transparency International Uganda, Uganda
5. ARTICLE 19 Kenya & Eastern Africa, Kenya
6. Jamaicans For Justice, Jamaica
7. FIDA Uganda
8. Green Watch, Kampala Uganda
9. Uganda Health and Science Press Association, Kampala Uganda
10. Uganda Journalists Association, Kampala Uganda
11. Norwegian Peoples Aid, Kigali, Rwanda
12. Society for Democratic Initiatives, Sierra Leone
13. Freedom of information Coalition, Sierra Leone
14. Media Foundation for West Africa
15. African Centre for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, Kampala ,Uganda
16. Human Rights First Rwanda Association, Kigali Rwanda
17. Recreation for Development and Peace, Masindi Uganda
18. Human Rights Network (HURINET-U) Kampala, Uganda
19. The National Congolese Union Press (UNPC), DRC
20. African Network of Constitutional Lawyers (ANCL), Cape Town South Africa
21. ACODE, Kampala Uganda
22. Kenya Union of Journalists and Allied Workers, Nairobi Kenya
23. Uganda Media Development Foundation
24. Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU)
25. Panos Eastern Africa, Regional Office, Kampala Uganda
26. Open Democracy Advice Centre (ODAC), Cape Town South Africa
27. Justice and Development Council (JDC), Kampala Uganda

28. Coalition for Health Promotion and Social Development (HEPS-Uganda)
29. Arab Freedom of Information Network (AFOINET), Morocco
30. Centre for Media Freedom, Morocco
31. Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda
32. Media for Peace and Religious Tolerance Organization
33. Concern for the Girl Child (CGC), Kampala Uganda
34. East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), Kampala, Uganda
35. Center for Women in Governance- CEWIGO, Kampala Uganda
36. Uganda National Health Users Organisation (UNHCO), Kampala Uganda
37. Transparency International Zambia
38. HURIPEC, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda
39. Action Coalition on Climate Change(ACCC), Kampala, Uganda
40. The Carter Center, Atlanta, USA
41. Life Concern (LICO) Paidha Uganda
42. Action for Community Development, Kampala, Uganda
43. Facilitation for Peace and Development (FAPAD), Lira, Uganda
44. Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL), Kampala, Uganda
45. Kumi Human Rights Initiative, Kumi, Eastern Uganda
46. Hope After Rape (HAR), Kampala Uganda
47. Uganda Women and Children Organisation (UWCO),Kampala Uganda
48. East Africa law Society (EALS), Arusha Tanzania

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