Declaration Adopted by Participants at the Parallel CSO Event at the ICIC/IDUAI Conference, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 September 2026

Access to Information as a Pillar of Information Integrity

Participating representatives of civil society organisations from 16 countries attending the Parallel CSO Day in Freetown on 30 September 2026, alongside the ICIC-IDUAI 2026 Conference, adopt the following Declaration:

Reaffirming that the right to access information held by public authorities (the right to information or RTI) is a fundamental human right which is important both in its own right and for the role it plays in underpinning other rights and benefits, including by supporting robust, participatory and accountable democracy, combatting corruption and building public trust in government;

Referring to our inaugural parallel CSO event alongside the 2025 Berlin ICIC event, as well as the Berlin CSO Declaration on the Right to Information and Environmental Justice which was adopted by participants at that event;

Highlighting the potential of effective RTI systems to support information integrity including by helping to ensure that authoritative, legally verifiable information crowds out falsehoods; by supporting the ability of journalists, civil society activists and academics to base the content they disseminate on reliable sources, thereby bolstering public trust in them; and by providing an invaluable resource for fact-checkers and others to debunk inaccurate claims and refute false narratives;

Recognising that the era of artificial intelligence (AI) is upon us and that it has enormous potential to deliver efficiencies and benefits in diverse areas of human engagement, including the right to information, while also noting that its use carries unique and as yet not fully understood risks, placing an obligation on States to remain vigilant in ensuring that effective guardrails are in place to mitigate those risks;

Applauding the large and active global community of civil society advocates who work to promote the right to information, while also expressing concerns about shrinking civic space in many countries, as well as escalating attacks on this community of human rights defenders;

Condemning the growing attacks on civic space in many countries, which takes the form of both legal and practical restrictions, as well as the significant decline in funding for the work of civil society organisations m(CSOs), and specifically for those working on RTI issues;

Noting that robust collaboration between civil society and information commissioners (oversight bodies) in a range of areas – including raising public awareness, training officials, promoting strong RTI laws and their positive interpretation, and ensuring these laws are implemented effectively – is essential to building and maintaining strong and effective RTI systems;

Recalling Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 16.10.2, which calls on States to adopt and implement RTI laws, and noting the importance of the right to information to advancing all of the Sustainable Development Goals and, at the same time, with just over four years left until the end of the SDG period, that 54 UN Member States have still not adopted RTI laws, while implementation of those laws among many of the 142 States which have adopted them remains a challenge.

Commit, as civil society activists:

To continue to work both individually and collectively to promote the right to information, including by advocating for the adoption and amendment of right to information laws to bring them into line with international standards and by working with relevant stakeholders, including officials, to promote the proper implementation of those laws.

To redouble our efforts to combat shrinking civic space, whether it takes the form of legal constraints on or practical barriers to our operations, and to address the precipitous decline in funding for our work.

To collaborate both with each other and with information commissioners so as to maximise the impact of our work, including through collective action and the sharing of best practices.

To increase our focus on the use of AI in RTI systems with a view both to taking full advantage of its power to drive better use and implementation of RTI laws and to preventing harmful impacts of this technology.

Call on States:

To create a robust legal framework for the right to information, in line with established international standards in this area, with a particular focus on the 54 UN Member States which still do not have any RTI law but also the many States whose RTI laws are in need of reform, including by refraining from adopting amendments which undermine existing laws.

To put in place effective systems and to allocate adequate resources to ensure the proper implementation of their right to information laws, including by collaborating in good faith with CSOs, as appropriate, to support implementation efforts; by ensuring accessibility of RTI systems to all; by undertaking public awareness raising and training efforts; and by ensuring an appropriate balance between the protection of privacy and respect for RTI.

To create and sufficiently resource strong and independent administrative oversight bodies (information commissions), with a broad mandate to both decide on appeals and support implementation efforts in other ways, such as through training and public awareness raising, and with adequate powers to investigate possible breaches of the RTI law and to issue binding orders where breaches have occurred, including to disclose information.

To increase the allocation of funding and other forms of support to CSOs which promote the right to information, whether domestically or internationally.

To refrain from any actions which undermine freedom of association, including by creating an enabling environment for CSOs and not putting in place unwarranted legal

barriers to the creation and operation of CSOs; by not undermining the work of CSOs in other ways; and by taking effective steps, as needed, to address attacks by third parties on civil society, including by adopting strong laws against strategic lawsuits against public participation (anti-SLAPP laws).

To engage responsibly with AI developments and to address the AI divide, including as relevant to RTI systems, so as both to support the safe, equal, transparent and RTI compliant use of AI to improve implementation of RTI laws, and to ensure appropriate safeguards for their own and others' use of AI.

Call on the ICIC:

To take steps to institutionalise a parallel civil society gathering alongside ICIC events, including by taking the needed formal steps to do this and by supporting this event at the next ICIC event in Ottawa in 2027.

To continue to support the engagement of civil society representatives with the ICIC, including by involving us in the planning of the agenda for and organising sessions in the open part of the annual ICIC event; by providing funding for CSO representatives to attend the ICIC event; by alerting CSO representatives to emerging threats to RTI; and by creating ongoing channels of communication and engagement for CSOs beyond the annual ICIC event.

Call on information commissions and commissioners:

To maintain and increase their collaboration with CSOs in such areas as public awareness raising, training of officials, engendering political support for robust respect for the right to information, and improving RTI legislation, including by putting in place ongoing channels for engagement with CSOs.

To provide guidance and support to different stakeholders as to how to integrate AI effectively and safely into RTI systems, at the demand- and supply-sides as well as in their own oversight work.

Call on all stakeholders, including inter-governmental organisations:

To work together to promote progress on SDG Indicator 16.10.2, redoubling efforts aimed at having laws adopted in those countries where this has still not been done, at improving weaker RTI laws and at bolstering implementation efforts across all countries with laws.