



African Platform on Access to Information (APAI)

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June 6, 2016

Dr Jim Yong Kim
President
The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW Washington
DC 20433 USA

Dear President Kim,

RE: Downgrading Freedom of Information Programme at the World Bank

We, the undersigned organisations and campaigners working on freedom of information issues, are concerned by news that the World Bank has significantly downgraded its capacity to pursue a global right to information agenda at a time when the World Bank's role in this area is needed more than ever before. We are concerned that both the decision itself and the diminished capacity of the Bank to engage on this critically important issue will send the unfortunate message to governments of developing countries around the world that the issue of transparency and, in particular, access to information, is no longer important or a donor priority.

We are also concerned about this development for the following reasons:

1. Reversal of Progress

The World Bank, through its Access to Information Programme, has played a key role in the passage and implementation of access to information laws around the world. In Africa, where the process was slow, the active support of the World Bank to governments and civil society organisations has resulted in the fast tracking of adoption of access to information laws from five countries in the 2010 to 18 in 2016. Closure of the World Bank's Access to Information Programme will not only hinder adoption and implementation of access to information laws but could also engender a reversal of progress.

2. Threat to Sustainable Development Goals

In support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the World Bank and other development partners will be providing developing countries with loans and grants. In his review of challenges to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Secretary General Ban Ki Moon noted the role that failed commitments and lack of transparency had played. It is for this reason that civil society organisations from around the world vigorously and successfully campaigned for inclusion of citizens' access to information in the Sustainable Development Goals. The need for citizens to access information on development financing and locally generated revenue is vital for the attainment of the SDGs. The World Bank's decision sends a negative signal in this regard.

3. Escalate Burden of Corruption on Ordinary People

In the absence of access to information and participation in programmes funded by governments and development partners, including the World Bank, the levels of corruption in Africa and other developing countries will undoubtedly escalate. We have noted that, by accessing public information and monitoring development projects, citizens are able to hold governments accountable and to contribute to the realisation of development outcomes. These efforts require the support of the World Bank's technical expertise and influence to create maximum impact. The World Bank cannot abandon citizens at this time.

4. Nothing about us without us

Over the past few years, multilateral institutions have moved towards being more inclusive of citizens through initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals, Global Partnership for Social Accountability, Open Government Partnership and Open Contracting, African Union Agenda 2063 among others. Through various consultations, civil society organisations and citizens have contributed to the formulation and shaping of the character of these initiatives. It is unfortunate that in taking away this critical support the World Bank has not consulted civil society. This violates a principle aptly outlined by African citizens at the recently concluded Open Government Partnership Regional Meeting in South Africa, in the phrase: *"nothing about us without us"*¹.

5. Wasting Important Work

The access to information implementation guidelines, which the World Bank is developing and on which it has had extensive consultations with civil society, are critical to strengthening both the adoption and implementation of access to information laws. How will the World Bank promote the use of these guidelines without dedicated or expert staff? Through the Open Government Partnership citizens have negotiated key access to information commitments in respective National Action Plans. How will the World Bank support their realisation without a Unit focusing on this important agenda?

The World Bank's role in standard setting on key transparency and integrity initiatives in development programmes has been unparalleled. At a time when discussions on SDG indicators on access to information as set out in Goal 16 target 10 are high on the global agenda, the World Bank's leadership and expertise is needed. Indeed the World Bank has already been actively engaged in the development of indicators for measuring Goal 16 target 10 on access to information which is crucial for success. Where does this disbandment leave the process?

6. Retrospective impact to existing loans and other facilities

Should the World Bank decide not to alter its course, we are concerned about the retrospective impact this may have for existing loans and other facilities that incorporate ATI as a trigger, or at the very least a condition of the loan. Will the decision to downgrade the Freedom of Information Programme have the retrospective effect of negating the ATI element of those deals going forward? Or will those countries still be obliged to report on their progress in ATI? Further who will monitor the progress as the ATI unit is to be disbanded?

Mr. President, the fight against poverty is about people. This fight cannot be won without people being able to access information. We strongly recommend that, rather than downgrading the Access to Information Unit, the World Bank should strengthen it so as to be able to continue the important work that the World Bank has been doing in this area.

¹ OGP Africa Regional Meeting, May 4-6, 2016 Cape Town, South Africa

Signed:

Continental and Regional Networks

1. Africa Freedom of Information Centre, Kampala, Uganda
2. African Platform on Access to Information, Windhoek, Namibia
3. Alianza Regional por la Libre Expresión e Información, Chile
4. Federation of African Journalists, Dakar, Senegal
5. Media Institute of Southern Africa, Windhoek, Namibia
6. Africa Freedom of Expression Exchange, Accra, Ghana
7. The Access Initiative (TAI), Washington, DC

Civil Society Organisations

8. Media Rights Agenda, Lagos, Nigeria
9. Open Democracy Advice Centre, Cape Town South Africa
10. Tanzania Citizens Information Bureau, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
11. Never Again Rwanda, Kigali, Rwanda
12. Namibia Media Trust, Windhoek, Namibia
13. Public and Private Development Centre, Abuja, Nigeria
14. Human Rights Network for Journalists, Kampala, Uganda
15. Centre for Media Freedom, Casablanca, Morocco
16. Human Rights Network Uganda, Kampala, Uganda
17. Observatoire d'Etudes et d'Appui à la Responsabilité Sociale et Environnementale, Democratic Republic of Congo
18. Centre for Law and Democracy, Halifax, Canada
19. Article 19, London, United Kingdom
20. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, New Delhi, India
21. Media Foundation for West Africa, Accra Ghana
22. Centre for Human Rights Rehabilitation, Lilongwe, Malawi
23. Tanzania Constitutional Forum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
24. Uganda Road Sector Support Initiative, Kampala Uganda
25. Burundi Journalists Union, Bujumbura, Burundi.
26. The Leadership Forum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
27. Tanzania Coalition on Debt and Development (TCDD), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
28. Social Economic Research and Development Centre, Abuja Nigeria
29. Africa Centre for Integrity and Anti-corruption Studies, Kampala, Uganda
30. Rural Women Development Initiative (RUWODI), Bagamoyo - Tanzania
31. Youth First Initiative, Iloilo City, The Philippines
32. Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, Port Vila, Republic of Vanuatu, South West Pacific.
33. Ikeoha Foundation, Enugu Nigeria
34. Sahkar Social Welfare Association Pakistan
35. Integrating Livelihoods thru Communication Information Technology for Africa, Kampala, Uganda
36. Global Integrity, Washington, DC
37. International Trust, London, United Kingdom

38. Association for Promotion Sustainable Development, Hisar, India
39. National NGO Forum, Kampala, Uganda
40. OpenTheGovernment.org, Washington, DC
41. Collectif 24, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
42. CODHOD, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
43. OPELE Radio and Télévision Labari, Niamey, Niger
44. Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding, Monrovia, Liberia
45. Access Info Europe, Madrid, Spain
46. Access to Information Programme, Bulgaria
47. Anticorruption Coalition Uganda, Kampala, Uganda
48. Transparency International Uganda, Kampala, Uganda
49. HakiTaarifa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
50. Jordan Transparency Centre, Amman, Jordan
51. Transparency International, Ukraine
52. Open Knowledge, Ireland
53. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Georgia
54. Democracy Education Centre (DEMO) Mongolia
55. Kosovo Center for Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption - KUND 16, Kosovo
56. Anticorruption Trust of Southern Africa, Harare, Zimbabwe
57. Ghana Anticorruption Coalition, Accra Ghana
58. Naymote Partners for Democratic Development, Monrovia, Liberia
59. Open Mind, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
60. Federation of Environmental and Ecological Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and Human Rights, Cameroon
61. Paralegal Association, Zambia
62. Transparency International Zambia
63. Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, Islamabad, Pakistan
64. Children's Rights Education, Dr. Salua Nassabay. Germany
65. Programa Juventud Siglo XXI, Eduardo Vergara. Mexico
66. Triumphant Hand of Mercy Initiative, THOMI AFRICA, South Africa
67. Mongolian Women's Employment Supporting Federation, Mongolia
68. New Haven Cooperative Society, Benin, Nigeria
69. Youth Vision Sound, Arusha, Tanzania
70. Transparencia por Colombia
71. Fundación Ciudadanía y Desarrollo, Ecuador
72. Citizens United to Promote Peace & Democracy in Liberia
73. Centro de Estudios Ambientales y Sociales (CEAMSO), Paraguay
74. United Earth of Men, Democratic Republic of Congo
75. Federation of Environmental and Ecological Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and Human Rights, Kumba, Cameroon
76. The Governance, Cape Town, South Africa
77. Leadership Initiative for Youth Empowerment, Nigeria
78. Terra 1530, Moldova
79. Local Empowerment for Good Governance, Mombasa, Kenya
80. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Botswana Chapter, Gaborone, Botswana
81. Socio-Economic Empowerment for Good Governance, Mombasa, Kenya
82. Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL), Liberia
83. AfroLeadership, Yaoundé, Cameroon

84. Ghana Right to Information Coalition
85. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe Chapter, Harare, Zimbabwe
86. FIDA Kenya
87. Fundacion Gobierno Abierto Colombia
88. Asociación Centro Ciudadano de Estudios para una Sociedad Abierta (ACCESA), Costa Rica
89. Youth Vision Sound of Tanzania
90. Twaweza East Africa, Tanzania
91. Code for Africa, Nairobi, Kenya
92. African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR), Kenya
93. National Union of Somali Journalists, Mogadishu, Somalia
94. POS Foundation, Accra Ghana
95. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Malawi Chapter, Lilongwe, Malawi
96. Policy Alert, Nigeria
97. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Africa Office, Ghana
98. Sonora Ciudadana AC
99. Liberia Freedom of Information Coalition, Monrovia
100. Gobierno Abierto Centro de Pensamiento
101. Fundación Pro Acceso, Chile
102. Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión (IPLEX), Costa Rica
103. Espacio Público, Venezuela
104. Fundación Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (FVBCH), Nicaragua
105. Asociación Nacional de la Prensa (ANP), Bolivia
106. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Lesotho Chapter, Maseru, Lesotho
107. Asociación por los Derechos Civiles (ADC), Argentina
108. Artículo 19, Brasil
109. Acción Ciudadana, Guatemala
110. Centro de Archivos y Acceso a la Información Pública (CAInfo), Uruguay
111. Fundamedios, Ecuador
112. Fundar - Centro de Análisis e Investigación, México
113. Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental (IDEA), Paraguay
114. Crea Think, Mexico
115. Causa Natura A.C. Mexico
116. South Africa History Archive (SAHA), Johannesburg South Africa
117. Construyendo Organizaciones Civiles Transparentes A.C. Mexico
118. The African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms Secretariat
119. Institute for Public Policy Research, Windhoek, Namibia
120. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Namibia Chapter, Windhoek, Namibia
121. Namibia Women's Health Network, Windhoek, Namibia
122. Sister Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia
123. Citizens for an Accountable and Transparent Society (CATS)
124. Insight Magazine, Windhoek, Namibia
125. Legal Assistance Centre, Windhoek, Namibia
126. Access To Information In Namibia (ACTION) Coalition, Windhoek, Namibia
127. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zambia Chapter, Lusaka, Zambia
128. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Angola Chapter, Luanda, Angola
129. Benin Santé et Survie du Consommateur, Benin
130. Transparency International Sierra Leone

Individuals

131. Reynaldo Castro Melgarejo, Open Government Independent Consultant,
Papantla, Veracruz, Mexico
132. Frederico Links, Namibia
133. Zoé Titus, Namibia
134. Hilya Nekwaya, Namibia

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