

MISA stresses need for access to information in Africa

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) on 15 April 2012 bemoaned the current state of access to information in Africa, citing the negative impact the glaring lack of information is having on the citizenry. This observation was made during the ongoing NGO Forum of the 51st Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in the Gambian capital of Banjul.

Referring to the African Platform on Access to Information campaign initiated in 2011, MISA regional specialist on media policy and law, Karen Mohan, said access to information is a right that many African citizens were still struggling to realise.

She said this was despite the fact that the right to freedom of information is one that is enshrined in a host of regional and international instruments such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and Article 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa.

Mohan noted that access to information is a fundamental part of freedom of expression and argued that when citizens are ill-informed and unable to access basic public information, it is consequently impossible for them to exercise their right to freedom of expression.

This in turn adversely affects citizens' basic rights to health, employment, education, participation in public discourse, as well as the ability to fight corruption, among other aspects.

Mohan also explained that the African Platform on Access to Information was initiated in 2011 as a way of promoting access to information and impressing that it is a right that many African citizens still continue to be deprived of.

She urged members of the NGO Forum to register their support towards the cause by calling for a resolution which will request:

1. Endorsement of the APAI Declaration by signing it.
2. Endorsement of a recommendation for the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) to pass a resolution authorising the ACHPR Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa to expand Part IV of the Declaration of Freedom of Expression in Africa to include principles of the APAI Declaration.
3. Endorsement of a recommendation to the ACHPR requesting the African Union Summit to:
 - a. Adopt 28 September as International Right to Information Day.
 - b. Initiate an experts meeting to develop a continent wide instrument on the right of access to information.

Source: allAfrica.com

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