



MISA Press release: Meeting of Experts in Addis Ababa to discuss draft APAI declaration

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A meeting of experts took place in Addis Ababa last week, June 13 - 17, hosted by Friederich Ebert Stiftung (FES Ethiopia). The meeting consisted of ten experts on Freedom of Information, who make up the working group of the *Windhoek + 20 campaign on Access to Information in Africa* (see www.windhoekplus20.org).

They came together to finalize the first draft of the Access Platform on Access to Information (APAI) declaration, as well as meeting with their partners, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and representatives from the African Union (AU).

The meeting of experts acts as prelude to the *Pan African Conference on Access to Information*, which will be held in Cape Town from September 17 - 19, where the APAI draft declaration will be presented to over 100 influential participants across Africa from civil society, media, policy makers, development partners, technical companies, private and public bodies, spanning some 40 to 50 countries throughout the region

Taking account of the importance of having an African declaration on Access to Information, the working group with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, conducted several successful meetings with the African Union, in order to garner support for the draft declaration.

Senior AU officials greeted the proposed declaration with enthusiasm, stressing the increasing importance of implementing Access to information mechanisms and shared values in order to empower citizens and to combat corruption.

The African Union is currently striving towards an image, whereby it will become a union of the people, and not just of African States. The officials from the three Directorates of Information and Communications, Political Affairs and African Citizens told the expert delegation that they would help in taking the declaration forward, for adoption at a continental level, as well as promoting the need to officially recognize the 'Access to Information' day annually on September 28.

Following the successful meetings with the AU, the working group met with its partner, UNESCO, to discuss the first draft of the declaration, and the importance

of officially recognizing 'Access to Information Day', as the adoption of the declaration by the UN.

UNESCO stressed the importance of creating a document that is specific to the African Region.

Taking note of the meetings held with both the AU and UNESCO, a series of discussions followed involving the members of the Windhoek +20 working group, and a representative of Transparency International. This resulted in a draft APAI declaration, which reflects current issues affecting access to information in Africa. The draft will shortly be made available to the public for comment, whereupon a final draft will be developed for the Cape Town Conference in September. It is envisaged that the declaration will feed through AU structures and that it could be considered at the Heads of State summit in February 2012.

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