

Marking the 20th year of the Windhoek Declaration:

Pan African Conference on Access to Information (PACAI)

Dates: Sept 17-19, 2011, Cape Town

Duration: 2 days conference, 1 day of hands-on workshops

Overview:

This gathering, the PACAI, capitalises on the 20th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, to make a difference to information access. The event is convened by the *Windhoek+20 Campaign on Access to Information in Africa** in conjunction with UNESCO, and possibly the African Union. It will be one of several conferences taking place simultaneously in Cape Town, and it will share an opening session with them. The totality of events will come together for a joint closing session, dubbed as the *Africa Information and Media Summit (AIMS)***.

The ultimate outcome of these conferences, and of combining some 1000 delegates and several constituencies, is to generate a declaration that can be as influential as the original Windhoek Declaration which promoted media freedom and gave rise to World Press Freedom Day. At this point in history, the emphasis is on the other side of the media-freedom coin: i.e., access to information. The September declaration is intended to serve as an instrument for further action, and it will likely be known as the *African Platform on Access to Information (APAI)*. It is intended that PACAI itself will attract some 100 leading and influential participants across Africa from civil society, media, policymakers, development partners, tech companies, private and public bodies,

spanning some 40-50 African countries.

Context:

The Africa envisaged in the Windhoek Declaration of 1991 is still a far cry from the repressive media environments that endure in many African countries. But two decades later, a lot has changed for the better, even if many negative tendencies persist. Thus, in many African countries today, press freedom and/or freedom of expression are constitutional rights and the media market is diverse, liberalised and growing. However, as regards Access to Information (ATI), most of Africa has lagged behind, including in transparency and in ICT development. There are only six countries in Africa with Access to Information laws: South Africa, Uganda, Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia and Nigeria. The implementation of these laws, along with the general issue of accessible information placed in the public domain more broadly, is sub-optimum, and much more could also be done through harnessing technological potential. Nevertheless, progress can be made by building upon existing documents like the “Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa”, the “African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance” and the Carter Center’s “Plan of Action for the Advancement of the Right of Access to Information”. The APAI to be adopted in Cape Town will add impetus to these steps towards progressive change.

Objectives of PACAIA:

- To concentrate the insight and power of stakeholders in information rights and access, particularly in Africa, to exchange knowledge and experience;
- To advance the momentum for transparency, public domain information and ICT-accessibility, particularly in Africa;
- To initiate a process for the adoption of an instrument (the APAI) which elaborates the right of access to information, sets standards and provides guidance to countries in the enactment and implementation

of access to information laws, and which may be put to the African Union Commission for its November session) (consultations with the African Union will take place mid-June);

- To contribute to the international community a call for the United Nations to give formal recognition of an International Day of Access to Information. *To date, the following have agreed to assist in drafting the declaration: UNESCO, UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Article 19.*

Who will benefit from taking part in PACAI:

- Media-support NGOs working in the field
- Transparency, anti-corruption, and environmental NGOs with interests in these issues
- Technology companies with interests in promoting information access through ICT
- Private sector representatives (e.g. extractive industry)
- Policy makers and members of parliament
- Civil society groups (eg. Trade unions)
- International experts (eg. African and UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression)
- UNESCO, African Union officials, sub-regional organs (e.g. ECOWAS, SADC, etc.)

Programme sketch:

DAY 1: Mapping the issues

1. Joint opening with Highway Africa and other conferences: why the APAI.
2. Review of media freedom progress since Windhoek 1991
3. Interrogating rights and practical access to information and their relation to law, policy, practices
4. Assessing interests of key sectors in information rights and access, including media, extractive industry watchdogs, technology firms, governments – and their progress to date
5. Discussion of progress on a draft law, being spearheaded by the African Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information.

DAY 2: What we can learn from specific cases

1. Elections, revolutions and ATI in relation to the African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Governance
2. ICTs and the public domain information
3. Media uses of ATI
4. Exemptions, privacy and secrecy

DAY 3: Building capacity to take the agenda forward

1. Developing strategies for advocacy around the APAI declaration
2. Training sessions – information literacy, using ICTs to access and analyse information
3. Joint closing session with Highway Africa & others – the African Information and Media Summit: Adoption of the APAI declaration (including the International Day of Access to Information)

Possible supporters and speakers:

The organisers are interested in securing support and suggestions for speakers for this historic event. We are looking for scholarships for selected leaders from African countries to take part, and financial contributions towards the venue, translation services and organisational costs of the conference.

Contact: Guy Berger, G.Berger@ru.ac.za or Zoe Titus Zoe@Misa.org

* The Windhoek+20 campaign is a coalition whose member organisations are listed on the campaign website www.windhoekplus20.org

** The other conferences besides PACAI will be: Highway Africa (www.highwayafrica.com); Digital Citizens Indaba (<http://dci.ru.ac.za>); The African Editors Forum (www.taef.org), as well as gatherings of members of the African Media Leaders Forum.