

Manchester Declaration on Access to Information

Civil Society Organisations meeting in Manchester on the occasion of the 4th International Conference of Information Commissioners, hereby:

- recall the Cancún Declaration that affirms that access to information is a fundamental right and an essential condition for democratic governance, accountability, the development of participatory democracy and economic development;
- call on governments to respect the right of access to information in line with international law and best practice;
- note with concern the increasing tendency to view access to information as a threat to public safety and security, and affirm that access to information is essential for protection of other human rights and contributes to social stability and security;
- recognise the crucial role played by information commissioners and similar independent oversight bodies, which should be sufficiently and sustainably resourced;
- affirm the importance of cooperation between civil society and information commissioners as essential for implementation of access to information laws. However, civil society should continue to play its watchdog role, including monitoring the implementation of national laws as well as the performance of information commissioners.
- note the value of access to information in the fight against corruption, as recognised by international treaties. In particular we urge all countries to sign and ratify the UN Anti-Corruption Convention, which requires States Parties to adopt measures that guarantee access to information;
- reiterate that the right of access to information should apply in full to all international organisations.

In the light of the foregoing, we support the elaboration by the Council of Europe of a treaty based on Recommendation 2002(2) on Access to Official Documents.

We call on the Council of Europe to ensure that the treaty recognises access to information as a human right; is consistent with the best law and practice of the Member States; and establishes an effective and sufficiently resourced monitoring mechanism.

We insist on an open treaty-drafting process in which civil society is meaningfully consulted.

Britannia Hotel, Manchester, 24 May 2006

As drafted by representatives of the following organisations :

Access Info Europe (Spain)
Access-info Centre (Moldova)
Access to Information Programme (Bulgaria)
Article 19 (UK)
Center for Democratization and Development of Institutions (Albania)
Center for Public Policy "Providus" (Latvia)
Citizen and Democracy Association (Slovakia)
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (India)
Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
e-Governance Academy (Estonia)
Freedom of Information Center (Armenia)
Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
Independent Journalism Center (Moldova)
LIMAC (Mexico)
National Security Archive (USA)
Open Society Archives (Hungary)
Foundation Open Society Institute - Macedonia
Fund for an Open Society, Serbia
Open Society b.a. Czech Republic
Open Society Justice Initiative (US)
Pro-Media (Macedonia)
APADOR-CH, Romanian Helsinki Committee
Statewatch (UK)
Sustentia (Spain)
Transparency International (Germany)
Transparency International BiH (Bosnia & Herzegovina)
Georgian Young Lawyers Association (Georgia)
Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights - YUCOM (Serbia)

and à titre personnel

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