



## **African Library & Information Associations & Institutions**

### **AfLIA Statement on Freedom of Information**

The African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) recognises the importance of Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression as a vital and a critical tool for democratic involvement and monitoring of governance and also as a fundamental and inalienable human right. The Principles of Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression in Africa signed in October 2002 in Banjul, The Gambia, includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other form of communication.

Although almost all the members of the African Union have ratified this principle, the implementation of this principle is affected by the lack of legislative approval in some countries. Most governments have so far failed to initiate a debate on Access to Information Bill in Parliament for approval. The absence of legislative enforcement and legally prescribed mechanisms for implementing this right has emboldened most governments in Africa to restrict freedom of access to information and expression in its activities.

This restriction is seen through how some governments and their agencies increasingly subject journalists, human rights activists, some organisations leading human rights protection and some citizens to administrative hindrances in their quest for information.

Most often African Governments have responded to information requests in two ways. They voluntarily provide scanty information or simply refuse to respond to information requested. The refusal is sometimes due to uncertainty as to whether it is appropriate to provide the information requested.

AfLIA affirms that information as one of the factors of production is the foundation for good decision making and good governance that leads to national development.

AfLIA believes that a well-informed Nation, Region or Continent brings forth an enlightened and a developed economy and society, therefore public information held by the state should not be treated as state secrets in a democratic society. AfLIA confirms that giving this principle a legislative endorsement will enable sharing of ideas among citizens, as well as assisting people to make informed decisions that will go a long way to strengthen Africa's democracies.

AfLIA as the continental Library Association in Africa, calls on all governments in Africa to make public information easily accessible to its citizens.