



For immediate release – 12 November 2009

PRESS RELEASE

Rwanda: ARTICLE 19 Reviews Draft Law on Access to Information

ARTICLE 19 welcomes a draft Law on Access to Information, which is due to be promulgated by the Government of Rwanda. In a comment on the Bill, ARTICLE 19 finds many positive features but also calls for a number of small changes which would ensure that this legislation would be an excellent model for other African countries.

ARTICLE 19 is encouraged that the Bill includes application of the law to private bodies, a public interest test for all exemptions and strong oversight, as well as enforcement powers by an Ombudsman and protection for whistleblowers.

“The right to access information held by public authorities is a fundamental human right and central to democratic participation, accountability and combating corruption,” comments Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *“In adopting its right to information law, Rwanda will join nearly 90 other countries and territories to have done so worldwide.”*

However, ARTICLE 19 urges the Rwandan Media High Council to clarify a number of provisions to ensure that they do not undermine the effectiveness of this strong Bill. These concerns include the following:

- The procedure for application of the Law to private bodies should be clarified;
- The scope and duration of exemptions should be limited;
- Protection of whistleblowers should be enhanced;
- Costs that can be imposed under the fee regime should be limited; and
- The legislation should provide for adequate funding for the Ombudsman.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Rwandan authorities to make these changes to ensure that the Law will effectively empower the right of access to information.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- To view the comment by ARTICLE 19, go to: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/rwanda-comments-on-draft-rwandan-law-on-access-to-information.pdf>
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name

from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.