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### PRESS RELEASE

## **West Africa: ECOWAS Champions Regional Right to Information Agreement**

**ARTICLE 19, the West African Journalists Association and other partners welcome the ECOWAS Commission’s initiative to develop a regional Protocol on the Right to Information, and to involve civil society and media associations in its drafting.**

The Protocol will establish regional legal standards for the Right to Information for the 15 countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Once the Protocol is approved, ECOWAS will recommend that member states adopt legislation putting the standards into national law. To date, none of the countries have adopted comprehensive Right to Information laws. The new Protocol will also complement the existing ECOWAS Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy, which reiterates principles of democracy and rule of law.

As part of the celebrations of World Press Freedom Day, the initiative was launched on 3 May 2010 in Dakar, Senegal. ARTICLE 19 West Africa, the West African Journalists Association (WAJA), Synpics, the WAJA national member in Senegal, and the International Federation of Journalists Africa Office held a press briefing to sensitise the media and seek their support.

*“A regional Right to Information protocol will fundamentally encourage professionalism and honesty of public servants, and make public institutions and media equally accountable, efficient and proactive. It will also immensely empower West African citizens and create public ownership of state and sub-regional institutions,”* says the initiative’s partners.

In the coming months, a series of regional consultations will be held to develop a draft protocol that will then be submitted to the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government. ARTICLE 19 will provide technical assistance and support in the drafting process while WAJA will coordinate, convene and organise regional stakeholders meetings to review the draft and publicise the process.

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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- 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.
- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional group of fifteen countries, founded in 1975. Its mission is to promote economic integration in "all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions, social and cultural matters."
- West African Journalists Association (WAJA) is a sub regional organization set up by journalists to defend and promote media freedoms, the safety and security of journalists in West Africa.
- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is the world's largest organisation of journalists. It promotes international action to defend press freedom and social justice through strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists.