PRESS STATEMENT PRESIDENT MAHAMA TO DELIVER A KEY NOTE ADDRESS AT A UNESCO EVENT TO MARK THE RIGHT TO KNOW DAY - REALLY!!!

[RTI-COALITION GHANA](https://www.facebook.com/RTICoalitionGhana/)·[FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2016](https://www.facebook.com/notes/rti-coalition-ghana/press-statement-president-mahama-to-deliver-a-key-note-address-at-a-unesco-event/1263990550302604/)·4 MINUTES

The Coalition on the Right to Information (RTI), Ghana has observed with interest the selection of His Excellency, President John Dramani Mahama by UNESCO to deliver the keynote speech at an event scheduled for September 26th to mark the first International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) (officially September 28), at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. September 28 was previously called the ‘Right to Know Day’ before it was declared by UNESCO member States in November 2015 as an international day to be celebrated as the ‘IDUAI’

Will the selection of President Mahama to speak at the September 26th event mark a new dawn for access to information in Ghana? Should we expect that after this international event, H.E will be motivated to, upon his return, engage Parliament to secure the passage of the RTI Bill with the critical amendments, as his government committed to do under the 2012-14 and 2016-17 Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plans?

President Mahama is scheduled to speak on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions specifically elaborating on the role of media and access to information in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, promoting access to justice for all and on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The event which is aimed at highlighting the key importance of Access to Information in the success of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will bring other guest speakers including journalists, NGO workers, entrepreneurs, academics etc. to share their experience and ideas on eleven SDGs with emphasis on how access to information will help in achieving them.

The RTI Coalition believes that the selection of President Mahama to speak on such a day as the ‘IDUAI’ and on such a topic, even though ironic given that Ghana has failed for more than a decade to put in place an access to information legislation, presents an opportunity for the President to make concrete commitments on the passage of an effective and efficient RTI legislation before the current Parliament lapses in 2017.

The Coalition would like to remind President Mahama that the progress to secure the review and passage of the RTI Bill since 2013 when H.E resubmitted the Bill before Parliament, has been very slow. In June 2016 the consideration of the Bill was stalled due to the lack of political will by the current Parliament to prioritize the consideration of the Bill as they promised.

As a Coalition, we are concerned that President Mahama has not demonstrated strong commitments to the passage of the RTI Bill despite his party’s commitment to same in their 2008 and 2012 manifestos. Being an election year, the failure by the 6th Parliament to pass the Bill before its tenure lapses would mean that the process will have to commence all over again with the new government and the new Parliament. As a result of this, the Coalition sent a petition to President Mahama through the Chief of Staff on August 18 2016 asking him to deliver on his party’s previous manifesto promises on the RTI Bill. Till date the Coalition has not received any response to the petition.

It is interesting to read the NDC’s 2016 manifesto promising as part of its 2017 – 2021 commitments to ***‘implement the Right to Information Bill when passed by Parliament****,* same promise that was made in 2012. However the 2016 manifesto omitted the very relevant part of the 2012 manifesto on the passage of the Bill as follows - ‘the ***next NDC Administration will … and work with the legislature to prioritise the passage of the Freedom of Information Act’***, meaning that government is not committed to engaging Parliament to ensure the passage of the Bill before and even after the elections. Does this mean that Ghanaians should wait for another four years before this law is put in place? As the Co-Chair of Eminent persons on the SDGs and given that the UNESCO’s celebration this year is focused on **‘powering sustainable development with public access to information**’, shouldn’t the passage of an RTI law **IN HIS EXCELLENCY’S OWN COUNTRY** be a priority now?

We would like H.E to know that Ghana as the beacon of democracy in Africa, as he emphasized at the recent UN General Assembly (UNGA), is lagging behind in terms of promoting access to information for citizens to effectively participate in governance and make informed choices. Several other African countries including countries in transition have successfully passed the law. For example: **South Sudan,** **Guinea,** **Niger,** **Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Nigeria, Rwanda and** most recently **Kenya and Tanzania** to mention but a few, have all passed the law.

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