

**PRESS STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACTION CAMPAIGN GROUP
READ AT THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS CENTER, WEDNESDAY, 14TH MARCH 2018**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the media, and members of the RTI Action Campaign Group.

This year marks 22 years since the first Right to Information (RTI) draft Bill was drafted under the auspices of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in 1996. It also marks 16 years since the Executive arm of government in 2002 drafted the first RTI Bill. This draft Executive Bill was subsequently reviewed in 2003, 2005 and 2007 but was never laid in Parliament until February 5, 2010. Since then, the RTI Bill has witnessed a series of failed promises to pass it from both the governments of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). In 2012, the 2010 RTI Bill lapsed and was relayed in 2016. In the final days of the 6th Parliament, an effort led by Hon Albert Bagbin, then Majority Leader, to pass the legislation was not successful after objections were raised by the then Minority NPP.

Even as the NPP was raising objections with the RTI Bill 2016, it had promised in Section IV (c) of its 2016 manifesto to 'ensure the passage of the RTI Bill if the present Parliament delays in doing so'. Accordingly, upon assuming office, on Thursday, February 2, 2017 the Vice President, Dr. Mahamadu Bawumia, restated the government's commitment to facilitate the passage of the RTI Bill. Then on May 3rd, 2017 while speaking at an event to mark World Press Freedom Day, the Minister for Information, Mustapha Hamid declared that by July 2017 the RTI Bill would be laid in Parliament giving an assurance to Ghanaians that the passage of the bill was non-negotiable. Unfortunately, the first year of the Akufo-Addo led-NPP ended with no action from the government. In response to enquiries as to the state of the Bill, both the Minister of Information and the Attorney General told Ghanaians that the Bill was with a Cabinet Sub-Committee headed by the Minister for Local Government, Hajia Halima Mahama who has been working on it.

The recent pronouncement by the President on March 6, 2018 that the RTI Bill will be laid before Parliament and passed before Parliament rises, marks a new round of assurances by the government to fulfill its own promise to pass the RTI Bill into law. Though we are encouraged by the renewed commitment of the President to see to the passage of the RTI Bill, we have been disappointed in the same manner before. Therefore, the RTI Campaign Group can no longer fold our arms and wait for the government. This is the reason why we are here today. **WE ARE HERE TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF CLAIMING OUR BIRTHRIGHT, OUR CONSTITUTIONAL, DEMOCRATIC AND HUMAN RIGHT.**

Why is the passage of the Right to Information Bill important?

First, our democracy is meaningless without clear legislation that regulates access to information held by government and public sector offices. The RTI is a democratic imperative. As citizens we elect and appoint public officers to work for us in the public good. As our representatives and workers they need to let us know how they are doing with the task we set for them and account for the stewardship and resources we gave them to carry out of that task. This can only be done if there are clear rules on how citizens can access information and keep informed of what their representatives are doing for them.

Second, it is the RTI that will give meaning to the many human rights that are guaranteed in Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution. How can a Ghanaian exercise his rights of free expression, thought, assembly, association as well as economic rights if she cannot access information held by the public, within limits set by the same constitution? In this day and age, getting timely information about an outbreak of a disease, insecurity in an area, traffic jams, fire outbreak, the performance of the economy (inflation, deficits, debt)

are critical to surviving on a day to day basis. Whether one is poor or rich the lack of information can create vulnerabilities for all of us. In this regard, it is only expedient to establish a framework where people can easily have access to information.

We understand Article 21 (1) (f) of the 1992 Constitution guarantees the right to information, which can effectively be enforced through the High Court. We celebrate the many brave patriots like members of Citizen Ghana Movement who have tested the law and achieved results. But how many people can hire lawyers to go to the Courts and seek an enforcement of their right to information? Moreover, this provision does not allow us to operationalize, direct, regulate how information can be accessed and at what cost. For this reason, the passage of the RTI Bill into law is very crucial.

What is the RTI Action Campaign Group going to do?

Starting from today, Wednesday, 14th March 2018, we have activated a **Countdown Clock**. The President's Independence Day statement on RTI said the bill would be laid and passed before Parliament rises for its meeting. Parliament is due to go on recess before the end of the month. At the minimum we expect the bill to be laid in Parliament before it goes on recess. We are already 16 years behind so we need to make up for lost time by moving quickly to lay the Bill.

Second, the Campaign will be instituting an **RTI Hall of Shame and Fame** where government agencies will be inducted based on how they are facilitating access to information for the citizens of Ghana. If an agency does well based on the transparent and reasonable metric we put in place, they will be inducted into the Hall of Fame and we will celebrate them. On the other hand, if they fail we will induct them into the Hall of Shame and draw attention to their failures so they can address them. As a campaign, we believe we should not wait for the Bill to be passed before Ministries, Departments, Agencies and District Assemblies provide relevant information to the public as part of the day-to-day operations. As we have said, this is a fundamental obligation under our Constitution.

Third, on May 3rd 2018, the whole world will descend on Ghana to celebrate **World Press Freedom Day**, which will be hosted by President Akufo-Addo and the People of Ghana. It will be odd if we celebrate this Day without the passage of an RTI Bill. Our message is simple: **Press Freedom is meaningless without a right to information legislation**. We expect the RTI legislation to be in Parliament and to be deliberated on by then.

We will also be embarking on an educational tour in the regions to engage the media, citizens of Ghana, public agencies to improve understanding of the need for the RTI bill and to mobilise further support.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, we have reached an important crossroad in our life as a country after 61 years of hit and misses. In the just ended 2016 elections, Ghanaians voted overwhelmingly to signal that they want a change in how we govern our country and action. The time for talking is over. If we mean business then we must act. If we want to fight the canker of corruption, help Mr. Martin Amidu do his work, achieve a Ghana Beyond Aid and transform this country, then we need the RTI law.

God Bless Ghana!

Thank you.