



Civil Society asks government to liberate Afghan Citizens from the burdens of corruption by passing an Act of Access to Information

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17 civil society actors, representing more than 200 civil society organisations, and several media organisations, unite before the approaching Kabul Conference to ask the Afghan Government to pass the draft Act of Access to Information prepared by Civil Society and Human Rights Network to grant Afghan citizens their constitutional right following Art 50 to access information. According to a recent survey in 2010, bribery has doubled in the last three years and amounts close to one billion dollars. The lack of information provides a prosperous environment for corruption, bribery and deprives citizens from accessing public services provided by the Afghan government and foreign assistance.

Access to information is a catalyst in improving state legitimacy, state responsiveness, citizens' trust in institutions and human rights. Due to lack of information, women are still marginalised and have limited access to public services and complaint mechanisms. Vulnerable individuals and poor households encounter corruption in procedures and nepotism in appointments, which worsens their living conditions and limits their contribution to their own development as they have unequal access to state services and resources, such as health, justice and education.

The Afghan government has expressed its desire in addressing corruption and civil society would like to call the government to expand its anti-corruption efforts to pass the Act of Access to Information to decrease the gap between the state and its citizens and improve the living condition of Afghans by accessing public services. Lack of information is not only detrimental for citizens and beneficial for corruption but it can also grant donors the reassurance that their tax payers' money is spent responsibly.

By the Afghan constitution, citizens have the right to ask what public institutions do but the supportive legislation is currently missing. The Act of Access to Information would empower citizens and help the central government in ensuring access to public services at provincial and district levels while assuring a fair distribution of wealth and promote trust in the state. The Act will also help Afghanistan to hold aid providers accountable to the needs of the Afghan population.

A transparent system with no accountability does not contribute to good governance. Policy makers are therefore requested to promulgate and implement an Act of Information which will build trust and respect between citizens and the state. This law should include amongst other:

- Provides the right of access to information, that is held or under control of public and private bodies, including assistance providers and subcontractors
- Gives heavy fines and sanctions, such as removal from office to officials who withhold information
- Publicise the procedures of public services and the responsibilities of civil servants (time, amount of money, documents required...)
- Gives the right to photocopy the original document in order to grant individuals the right to assess and study the information by themselves
- Provide for complaint mechanisms, including a hotline, to assure fulfilment of civil servant duties
- Disclose contracts

Moreover, the government of Afghanistan is requested to set a timeframe for the enactment of the Act of Access to Information and widely announce its enforcement to literate, illiterate, men and women in rural as well as urban areas in order to fully implement the Act. For citizens and institutions to benefit from the Access to Information law, the law needs to be supported by monitoring and implementing mechanisms.

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