

Media Update

29 September 2017

UNESCO

Press Release

Powering Sustainable Development with Access to Information

To commemorate the International Day for Universal Access to Information, UNESCO- in collaboration with the European Union, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the Embassy of Sweden, held a workshop titled "*Powering Sustainable Development with Access to Information.*" The event addressed public access to information, and Right to Information (RTI) laws.

In view of the relevance and importance of the universal access and right to action to advance Sustainable Development Goals, the event provided a platform for dialogue between government officials, civil society members, students, journalists, and the international community.

During the opening remarks, UNESCO's Representative, Ms. Vibeke Jensen emphasized the significance of proper policy and legislature as being paramount to achieving the goals set out by the SDGs. She said, "Only equitable access to and provision of information to everyone can truly advance progress in any society."

A key note address was delivered by the Secretary of the Ministry of Human Rights, Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha, where she highlighted the Right to Information as a fundamental human right. She iterated the need for a transparent RTI legislation, and the importance of citizen engagement.

Her Excellency, the Swedish Ambassador, Ms. Ingrid Johansson opened the exhibit on *The Swedish Freedom of the Press Unfolded*, stating that freedom of expression is a fundamental right we have to fight for together and it is an



instrument for democratic and developed societies.

During the discussions, the importance of inclusion of minorities in the laws, and gender sensitivity were quoted as issues of great importance. During the IPDC talks, Neil Buhne, UN Resident Coordinator, also called attention to the importance of bridging the gap of access in terms of technology among citizens. Mr. Ahmed Naeem- Deputy Director, Punjab Information Commission- pointed out the importance of media involvement in reporting about access to information stories. Owais Aslam Ali from PPF stressed the importance of the participation of the media in RTI discourse, and Shmyla Khan from the Digital Rights Foundation called for a further need for gender responsive laws in the context of access to information.

Roundtable discussions were moderated by theme experts. While presenting their findings, the moderators noted that there was a general consensus on the need for transparency and that information should be accessible through digitised means, and procedures in place should be easy to use by citizens.

During her address, her Excellency, the Ambassador of Netherlands, Ms. Ardi Stoios-Braken placed emphasis on the role of citizens, saying:

“Access to information and data is crucial to empower citizens to seek and receive information. This in turn can strengthen their trust in governments, states and their institutions.”

The EU Ambassador, His Excellency Jean François Cautain addressed the significance of gender disaggregated statistics, the inclusion of multiple languages in information portals, and the importance of RTI in the role of a democratic country. He said, “Access to information and freedom of information is vital for a strong democracy; it is important for accountability, participation and efficiency.”
