



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Thursday May 21, 2020

**A PRESS STATEMENT TO MARK ONE YEAR AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ASSENT TO THE RTI ACT, 2019
(ACT 989)**

A year ago today, on Tuesday 21st May 2019, H. E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, assented to the Right to Information Act, 2019 (Act 989) in the plain view of the Ghanaian people through a televised ceremony. He rightly noted that when properly applied, the law “will enhance the quality of governance in our country, and provide a critical tool for the fight against corruption in public life.” The law became effective on 2nd January 2020, as per the provisions of the Act.

Sadly, one year after the assent and 141 days since it took effect, major milestones as set out by the supervising Ministry, the Ministry of Information, in its roadmap towards the implementation of the Act have still not seen the light of day. Notable amongst these milestones are to;

1. Set up the RTI Commission Office, appoint Commissioners and fully staff and train the Office (all by 10th October, 2019),
2. Equip the Office of Head of Civil Service to set up Information Units within all public institutions; and recruit, train and place Information Officers in these Units (by end of August 2019),
3. Design template of Information Manual for Public Institutions (by September 9th, 2019), and
4. Draft a Legislative Instrument and lay same before Parliament by October 2019.

The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID 19) in Ghana in March 2020 has definitely disrupted government plans and redirected the attention of the Ministry of Information that has become the focal point for coordinating public communication on government’s response to the virus. The response to the virus outbreak has itself presented an opportunity for government to act in ways consistent with the RTI Act. In this respect, the Coalition on the Right to Information, Ghana (RTI Coalition) is happy to observe the proactive and responsive attitude the government has shown in providing information on the pandemic to the public. We are therefore minded to commend the President, Ministries of Information, Health, and the other relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government for living up to the tenets of the RTI Act 2019.

While, we acknowledge the challenges brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic, the Coalition wishes to emphasize that access to timely and adequate information and the need for

implementing the RTI roadmap has become more important than ever in these times of COVID-19. Crucially, Ghanaians need to know exactly what Government is doing to tackle the crisis, and how duty bearers will be held to account for policies and the increased emergency related public spending during these times. But more importantly is having the appropriate mechanism for accessing such critical information.

Monitoring the Global situation, we have observed some threats to many countries' obligations on access to information and public health which must not emerge in our own Country. These include some governments trying to limit criticism of poor decision-making or restrict human rights or hide corruption in emergency legislations that limit access to information about the pandemic and/or extend the deadlines by which governments have to respond to information requests; and the tendency to have public access to information deprioritized while public services are reduced. Under no circumstances must any government use the pandemic as an opportunity to cover up ineffectiveness, corruption or wider human rights abuses.

To this end, we call on government not to neglect its obligations under the RTI Act because we are dealing with a pandemic. All building blocks towards the effective implementation of the RTI Act must be put in place without any further delay.

We encourage government to continue to be proactive in sharing information and remain responsive to citizens' feedback and questions about the information government is supplying. Details of all contracts, grants, loans, support to companies, and other spending, as well as information on members of all committees providing scientific, economic or other advice to public bodies must be readily available to the public. Governance, human rights and law enforcement information must also not be left out of disclosure.

Similarly, we call on all citizens to take advantage of the RTI Act to demand information on public health data around coronavirus cases, deaths, testing, facilities, the country's involvement in drug trials, contingency planning and other issues. Effective implementation and use of RTI law requires driving both the 'supply side' (government establishing the internal systems and ensuring compliance) and 'demand side' (citizenry using the law to demand for information and monitoring implementation).

During the televised assent of the Act last year, President Akufo-Addo congratulated the 7th Parliament for the virtues of "courage, sense of responsibility and commitment to good governance" that Parliament exhibited in passing the law. We wish to remind the Government that these same virtues are relevant in executing its own roadmap for the full implementation of the RTI Act as stated above, because these structures would facilitate citizens' access to adequate and timely information on COVID 19 and other issues if they had been put in place.

Issued by the Coalition on the Right to Information, Ghana

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