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**WEBINAR IN COMMEMORATION OF
THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO
INFORMATION**

Closing remarks

Commissioner Jamesina King

Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in

Africa

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished participants;

We have come to the conclusion of today's discussions. Allow me to extend my sincere thanks to all the panellists and participants for the quality of their contributions. This clearly demonstrates your commitment to the cause of human rights promotion and protection on the continent, as well as your support to the work undertaken by the special mechanism on freedom of expression and access to information, in the discharge of its mandate.

During this commemoration, we have focused the discussions on the recently adopted **Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa**, as a way to raise awareness on its salient principles and to encourage the Commission's stakeholders to utilize this useful document. Specifically, we have sought to unpack and understand the various principles in the Declaration, in relation to freedom of expression, access to information, in addition to the promotion and protection of these rights in the digital age.

One additional principle, that is **Principle 43** which is in the final section of the Declaration, indicates key principles which are also note-worthy. **Principle 43(1)** calls on States Parties to "*adopt legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to give effect to the Declaration,*" in addition to stressing the State's responsibility to "*facilitate its dissemination.*"

Principle 43(2) reminds States of the need to "*review or adopt legislation on access to information*" in view of the importance of such legislation in ensuring realization of this right. Reference is made to the **Model Law on Access to Information**, which can serve as a tool for States Parties to translate the obligations related to the right of access to information into detailed national legislation.

Principle 43(3) calls on States to be guided by the **Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa** when adopting measures related to elections. These Guidelines were adopted by the Commission in November 2017 to develop a regional standard on access to information and elections, as a means of guaranteeing the credibility of elections and strengthening democratic governance in Africa.

Lastly, **Principle 43(4)** calls on States to provide detailed information in *each* Periodic Report, on the measures taken to facilitate compliance with the provisions of this Declaration. This principle refers to the responsibility of States Parties, as stated in Article 62 of the African Charter, to submit Periodic Report submitted to the African Commission every two years, on the measures which have been taken to implement the African Charter at the national level. Accordingly, the Declaration can serve as a guide to States when they reporting on the measures taken to give effect to Article 9.

Similarly, I would like to propose that National Human Rights Institutions and civil society organizations can also utilize the Declaration to guide the information provided in their shadow reports, which serve as a useful source of information to the African Commission when reviewing the States Periodic Reports.

All the soft law documents are available on the Commission's website; specifically on the webpage of the special mechanism. Let me seize this opportunity to call on all stakeholders to take ownership of these instruments, in order to ensure promotion and protection of human rights on our continent. Be reminded that this webinar is recorded and is available on you tube.

Before concluding my address, in the African spirit, please allow me to express my gratitude to my predecessors who were Special Rapporteurs who worked relentlessly on the development of this Declaration and other soft law instruments namely former Commissioners Adv. Pansy Tlakula of South Africa and Mr. Lawrence Murungu Mute

from Kenya. In the same vein I want to recognize the Senior Legal Officer of the African Commission's Secretariat Ms. Eva Heza who has supported the Special Rapporteur's mandate over the years.

Today I want to warmly thank you all the distinguished participants, in particular the representatives of States Parties of the African Union, National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society representatives who took part in this discussion which has been enlightening by our very knowledgeable Presenters and Moderator. Your active participation in these deliberations contributed immensely to the success of this memorable event.

As we have gathered in commemoration of the **International Day for Universal Access to Information**, allow me in my capacity as the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, to encourage you all to continue to advocate for the right of access to information, and the related right of freedom of expression in Africa.

I thank you for your attention. Please stay safe and well and God bless you all.



**Hon. Jamesina Essie L. King, Commissioner
Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information**