



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

STATEMENT ON THE RE-TABLING OF THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION BILL IN THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

BY DR PEYA MUSHELENGA

MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

15 September 2021

Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members,

Pursuant to my letter to the Honourable Speaker dated 23 July 2021 enquiring about the progress made of the access to Information Bill that I tabled last year on 17 June 2020 and the Honourable Speaker's reply dated 12 August 2021 informing me that the Bill has lapsed, I now re-table the Access to Information (ATI) Bill, in terms of Rule 24(b) of the Standing Rules and Orders and Internal Arrangements of the National Assembly tabled to this August House.

This Bill seeks to address the important issues of transparency in government and to guarantee our citizens freedom of information and the right to access public information, improving accountability and citizens' relationship with government. The Bill recognises the need to make sure our people have access to information held by public institutions and about their government.

Honourable Speaker,

The Access to Information Bill is one of the most progressive piece of legislation in our quest to maintain Namibia's democracy.

During the development stage of this Bill, the Ministry worked closely and in full collaboration and participation of key stakeholders such as civil society organisations, academia and legislative experts to ensure that the content of the Bill allows citizens to knowledgeably engage their government in all spheres of government architecture.

Notwithstanding the rationale and content I advanced earlier in this House regarding this Bill, I wish to reiterate that the purpose of the Access to Information Bill is to among others:

1. Enhance the accountability and transparency of government institutions in order to promote open and democratic society and to enable public to have access to information held by those bodies so as to enable them make informed decisions in the betterment of their lives.
2. In furtherance of that purpose, the Bill propose to provide a right of access to information in records under the control of a government institutions in accordance with the principles that government information should be available to the public, that necessary exceptions to the right of access to information should be limited and specific.

3. That decisions on the disclosure of government information should be reviewed independently of government, hence the proposal to establish an independent and impartial body to adjudicate on matters related to the implementation of the Bill.
4. In addition, the Bill also advocates for the proactive disclosure and publication of certain information held by public institutions with an understanding that communication is a fundamental social process which is considered a basic human need and the foundation of all social human beings.

In a nutshell, the Access to Information Bill strives to complement, enhance and create conducive environment for members of the public to access public information timely and without due hindrance. It is however important to state that the Bill is in no way intended to replace existing procedures for access to government information that is normally made available to the general public.

Honourable Speaker,

Mindful of the limited time at our disposal, particularly due to unpredictable COVID-19 situation, allow me to conclude by revisiting the statement I made when I tabled this Bill for the first time in this august house that:

“Access to information is of growing international concern, and is a topic on which African States are increasingly undertaking legislative reforms with an understanding that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Therefore, if enacted and properly implemented, the Access to Information Bill holds the premise of fostering good governance by improving information management, and by enhancing transparency, accountability and greater participation of the populace in public affairs.”

I would like to assure this august House that the comments previously made on the Bill are hitherto noted. I now have the honour to present the Bill before this august House and plead for support and dispose of without further ado.

I thank you.

