

A Right to Information Reception in Accra

Nana Oye Lithur

Coordinator, Africa Office, CHRI

An increasing number of Commonwealth associations are recognizing the importance of the right to information to their work and constituents. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, for instance, convened a study group on Access to Information in Ghana in July 2004. The group examined legislation and implementation issues in Commonwealth countries which have access regimes in place. The particular focus of the meeting was on identifying areas that have worked and others that have not, in terms of contributing to open governance.

CHRI participated in the event itself, as well as hosting a reception to enable Ghanaian activists to share ideas with their international counterparts. The Guest Speaker at the reception, the Editor of the Daily Graphic, Mr. Yaw Boadu-Ayeboah, spoke on accessing information as a human right for all. He stated that it would be wrong to suggest that enacting the Freedom to Information Act will benefit the media alone and, rather, that society thrived on the availability of and access to information, which is vital for the consolidation of democracy and governance. He stated that the overriding and underlying philosophy of this legislation is that freedom must be available to all. Democracy thrives on the quality of knowledge people have, and that these people must have access to a wide range of information to enable them to participate fully in the affairs of the society. This is imperative because open debate leads to greater truth and more informed decisions than where dissent is stifled.

In his welcome address, Mr. Sam Okudzeto, Chair of

CHRI's International Advisory Commission, also spoke of the importance of access to information to the functioning of a democracy. He highlighted how, due to lack of information, people do not know their power in deciding who forms the government.

A CPA representative and Fiji's Minister of Information, Mr. Simione Kaitani, explained that the Commonwealth wants members to recognise the importance of freedom of information laws. While Commonwealth members may have difficulties implementing this legislation, it is essential as it guarantees people the opportunity to freely participate in the development of their own countries.



CHRI's Right To Information reception.

Distinguished guests from Ghana included: Her Lordship Justice Anin Yeboah, Justice of the High Court; Hon. Freddie Blay, Deputy Speaker of Parliament; Hon. Alban Bagbin, Minority Leader of Parliament; Miss Anna Bossman, Acting Commissioner of the Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice; Angelina Baiden Amissah, Chairperson of Gender and Child Committee of Parliament; Mrs. Elizabeth Mills-Robertson, Deputy Inspector General of Police; and Hon. Hannah Tetteh Kpodah, MP. It was pleasing to note the importance placed on access to information by such luminaries in Ghana, and CHRI Africa looks forward to working with them in realizing the right to information in Ghana. Guests from the CPA study group included: Hon. Abdul S. Oroh, Deputy Chairman, Human Rights Committee, House of Representatives (Nigeria); Mr. Simione Kaitani, Minister of Information of the Fiji Islands; and Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab, MP from India. ■