

Government soon to draft long-overdue Freedom of Information Act, says minister

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(MISA/IFEX) - On 27 April 2006, the Swaziland Minister for Public Service and Information, Themba Msibi, announced that the Swazi government has commissioned consultants to draft the long-overdue Freedom of Information Act.

The minister was addressing officials of MISA-Swaziland and the Swaziland National Association of Journalists (SNAJ) during a meeting at his office. MISA and SNAJ had met the minister to brief him about the forthcoming World Press Freedom Day on 3 May. The drafting of this proposed legislation, the minister said, was in line with the recently adopted Media and Information Policy which was, in turn, a result of a widely consultative process. He said the government has engaged consultants from the Commonwealth Secretariat in London to lead the process. The exercise is expected to begin soon. The minister assured media stakeholders that they will be consulted during the drafting of the legislation. Both MISA and SNAJ welcomed the exercise and hoped the new legislation, once enacted into law, will improve access to information, which MISA advocates for.

BACKGROUND:

There is currently no freedom of information legislation in Swaziland. When information is requested from public institutions, including government departments, there are stringent screening conditions and bureaucratic barriers to be overcome. The Official Secrets Act, 1963, prohibits access to government secrets. Access to such information is not seen as a right but as a privilege. Unorthodox means of information gathering put journalists in danger of violating the law - an impediment to investigative journalism. MORE INFORMATION:

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