

ATI STAKEHOLDERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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PRESS RELEASE

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ATI Stakeholders Deeply Disappointed at Start of Process to Review ATI Act

The Access to Information Advisory Stakeholders Committee, which was formed with the active encouragement of, and agreement to its terms of reference by, the Minister of Information, Senator Burchell Whiteman, has been working on the issue of Access to Information for the past two years. The committee has written to the Minister on more than one occasion asking about the review of the ATI Act and to date has received no answer from him. The Committee is thus deeply disappointed that the Minister has not informed us of the plans for the review, of the formation of Joint Select Committee of Parliament, nor that its first meeting would be held today. Nor has the Minister sought to ensure our involvement in the review of the Act by inviting the ATI Advisory Stakeholders Committee, in his capacity as Chairman of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament to make submissions to assist the deliberations of the Committee.

The review of the Access to Information Act is a matter in which both the ATI Stakeholders Committee and the wider public have a deep and vested interest and would expect to be included at every step of the way.

The ATI Advisory Stakeholders Committee is worried that the way the Parliamentary Committee has been constituted and held its first meeting without informing either the public, or the Stakeholders Committee constitutes a violation of the understandings between the Minister, the Public and the Advisory Stakeholders Committee. We also feel that this unfortunate beginning to the review of the Act does not auger well for the review process.

The ATI Advisory Stakeholders Committee urges the Minister, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Review Committee, to rethink the process to this point, the procedures and the communication strategies for this important parliamentary committee. We urge the Minister to invite submissions from interested stakeholders and the wider public to the Committee, providing sufficient time for informed and meaningful submissions to be made, and to ensure that the deliberations and decisions of the Committee are given the widest public exposure possible.

We urge all Jamaicans to take an interest in the deliberations of this Parliamentary committee so as to give meaning to the objects of the Act, which are to reinforce certain fundamental principles of democracy, namely, governmental accountability, transparency and public participation in national decision making.