

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The ACA and 2,734 Citizens Petition the National Assembly for The Enactment of The Access to Information (ATI) Bill into an Act of Parliament.

On September 27th, 2023, the Alliance for Community Action (ACA), with support from Panos Institute Southern Africa, Common Cause Zambia and the ATI Coalition, presented a petition to the National Assembly. This petition, signed by 2,734 citizens from across the country, urges the swift enactment of the ATI Bill into law. The petition was submitted pursuant to Article 88 (1) of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act, No. 2 of 2016 which allows citizens to petition the National Assembly to initiate the enactment, amendment or repeal of legislation.

The journey towards securing access to information law in Zambia has been marked by persistent citizen-led efforts spanning over two decades. Despite recent numerous stakeholder engagements and notable progress, the bill remains in draft form, waiting to be tabled in the House. Cabinet through the Ministry of Information and Media initially set a deadline for the end of June 2023 as when the Bill would be presented, but regrettably, this deadline was not met.

Access to Information is not just a legal provision but one of the key pillars of a thriving democracy. A well-informed public is essential for participatory democracy, and the ATI law is pivotal in ensuring transparency, accountability, and civic engagement. It empowers citizens to scrutinize government actions, exercise their rights, and engage in informed dialogues on matters affecting their lives.

We also note that on the same day that we presented our petition, the President, Mr. Hakainde Hichilema acknowledged that people have the right to know. He also urged the new Minister of Information and Media to ensure that there was an efficient flow of information by creating 'frameworks' that would allow data to flow. We wish to welcome that pronouncement but also emphasize that, proactive access to information is the best framework that will facilitate a timely and accurate flow of information to citizens. We therefore wish to urge the President to ensure that the new minister delivers on the promise that the government made to the Zambian people.

Given the critical importance of the ATI Bill and the persistent obstacles we encounter in our quest for transparency and accountability, we joined hands with our partners to present the petition to the Speaker of the National Assembly. Our aim is clear: to expedite the enactment of the ATI Bill into an Act of Parliament, with the firm goal of achieving this milestone by the end of 2023.

Issued by Andrew Banda – Information and Advocacy Officer

About the ACA:

*The Alliance for Community Action (ACA) is a local civil society organization that works exclusively towards the articulated vision of a Zambia in which all her citizens enjoy the full and equitable benefit of all her resources. The ACA is committed to enabling Zambian citizens to express their opinions and to strengthen their ability, through its initiatives the media and other civil society organizations – to hold duty bearers accountable. **Ends!***