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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

### National Security and Open Government: Striking the Right Balance

**A symposium supported by The Open Society Justice Initiative, The Campbell Public Affairs Institute and The Maxwell School of Syracuse University**

Access through: <<http://www.freedominfo.org>>

This international symposium explores how well governments are striking the balance between national security concerns and openness. The symposium will consist of a series of contributions published on the Internet throughout Spring 2003.

The first contribution is now available through <<http://www.freedominfo.org>>:

National Security vs. Openness: An Overview and Status Report on the Johannesburg Principles by Toby Mendel, Law Programme Director Article 19, The Global Campaign for Free Expression.

#### Forthcoming commentaries

February 28: *National security and open government in the United States* by Tom Blanton, Director, National Security Archive.

March 15: *National security and open government in the United Kingdom* by John Wadham, Director, LIBERTY.

March 30: *National security and open government in Central and Eastern Europe: The Bulgarian experience* by Alexander Kashamov, Coordinator of Legal Projects, Access to Information Programme Foundation.

April 7: *National security and transparency in the European Union*, by Professor Deirdre Curtin, Head of the Department of the Law of International Organizations, Utrecht University.

April 15: *Privacy and Security: Issues and Analysis*, Bruce Berkowitz, Senior Policy Analyst, Rand Corporation, and Research Fellow, Hoover Institution.

This symposium being organised by Professor Alasdair Roberts, Director, Campbell Public Affairs Institute, Maxwell School, Syracuse University.

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### Proposed amendments to the Irish FoI Act

The *Irish Times* (13 Feb 2003) reports that a secret review by a group of top civil servants had reported to the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) that the Irish FoI Act ought to be amended. A primary driver in the review was the approaching deadline of 21 April 2003 when the first Cabinet papers from five years previously are accessible under the legislation. Furthermore recent release of information under the legislation has severely embarrassed the government. One of the opposition leaders succinctly captured the government's concerns when they wrote 'On a rolling basis over the next five years, we will be able to see the background papers and advice which went to the Government and underpinned all major decisions taken by this Government'.

### Training begins in Jamaica

In mid January training commenced for several hundred public servants in Jamaica. The training will extend until mid July. The Act was passed in June 2002 and becomes operational later in

2003. A key part of the training is to expose the civil service to the expectations of civil society organisations and members of the public.

### Malaysia starts to think about FoI

In December 2002 planning started for a Malaysian national conference on Access to Information, held under the United Nations Development Project but being organised by Strategic Analysis Malaysia, an on-line think-tank. Consultations were conducted with alternative media groups and civil society groups, while the national conference includes these two sectors, along with academics, government officers, mainstream media and media owners.

The conference was due to be conducted in January but was postponed to a later date.

### Press for access to information reform in Canada

At a hearing of the ad hoc 'MPs on Access Committee' on 24 February 2003, headed by Liberal MP John Bryden, the Open Government Canada (OGC) coalition criticised flaws in the federal government's Access to Information Review Task Force report and called for much stronger reforms to the federal *Access to Information Act* (ATI Act) and access system to be implemented as soon as possible.

The Canadian Association of Journalists is a founding member of OGC. OGC submitted its position paper on the access law and system to the Committee. 'The current federal access to information system actually encourages secretive and unaccountable behaviour by Cabinet ministers and public officials', said Duff Conacher, a member of the OGC Steering Committee, and Coordinator of Democracy Watch, who testified on behalf of OGC at the hearing. 'The federal government should stop delaying changing the law in ways needed to end the culture of secrecy that threatens our democracy.' See Open Government Canada <<http://www.opengovernmentcanada.org>>; Canadian Association of Journalists <<http://www.caj.ca>>.

### Debate continues in Indonesia

Debate still continues in the Indonesian parliament as to whether the National Security Bill and Freedom of Information Bill should be considered together or individually. Opposition members of parliament and non-government organisations are keen to debate the two Bills separately. Article 19 proposes to hold forums on freedom of information in Jakarta on the 14-15 March 2003 and a workshop in Manila, Philippines on the 17 March 2003.

**Editorial Co-ordinator:** Elizabeth Boulton

**Typesetting and Layout:** Last Word

**Printing:** Thajo Printing Pty Ltd, 4 Yeovil Court, Wheelers Hill 3150

**Subscriptions:** \$66 a year or \$44 to *Alt. LJ* subscribers (6 issues)

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