

**SPEECH OF MR LAMBERT MENDE OMALANGA, MINISTER OF
COMMUNICATION AND MEDIAS OF D. R. CONGO AT THE CARTER
CENTER CONFERENCE ON THE INFORMATION RIGHTS**

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

After hearing valuable presentations about the transparency dilemma and critical access of the information, I would share with fellow participants lived experiences of my country the Democratic Republic of the Congo where one should complain instead of some kind of overdose of mass-media enterprises. For some people the big number of medias in the DRC is an evidence of democratic good governance. In fact this overdose yields more heat than light because it did not have significant impact on the information access.

The information access in a country depends largely on the *modus operandi* of the professionals who must be able to get to the best sources. Sadly, in my country, journalists show very little ability to get physically where events happen due to financial and logistic deficit. The New Technologies of Information and Communication are not sufficiently available for all.

The radio, television and newspapers play a crucial role in building a public opinion within the Nation whose sociological components gathered effectively and conscientiously since less than eighty years. This is why in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, journalists are true opinion leaders. This situation can help to weigh their moral responsibility while reporting or analyzing current affairs. Hardly viewers, listeners and readers would have question the sources veracities, neither the journalists real motivations.

The critical access to State institutions data is a key factor for allowing a democratic participation. Correctly informed, citizens would be able to assess the governance. Such an access is also essential in order to promote more transparency in public management.

In the DR Congo, structures for regulating medias have been institutionalized. They are aimed at monitoring the deontology and rules conducting the profession thus, emphasizing the commitment of professionals to deserve the public trust that will lobby for more openness toward the press from public institutions.

Among the challenges which dilute the right to the information in DRC, one can mention the poor management/technical skills, the lack of financing capacities and, last but not least, the *auto-censure* by medias professionals themselves. I think that at this point, they shouldn't be the only one to blame. Nobody can emerge from four decades of tyranny without psychological consequences. More than many fellow Africans, Congolese have been subjects for too long to an autocratic system which crushed the people's fundamental rights, including the freedom of the media. Wars, predation (looting), corruption and impunity worsened the opacity of public affairs in my country. The new democratic institutions, set up by the 2006 general elections are vigorously pushing the change. In doing this we really sensed the need of a public opinion and a political consciousness building by free media.

Meanwhile, one should integrate that some limits of access to information are unavoidable in regard to public order, national security and defense whose imperatives can legitimate the restraint of such an access. The Democratic Republic of Congo which is a post-conflict country is well aware of that. Also, dispatching information backed on unjustified intrusion in the privacy as it is often experienced in Internet cannot be allowed.

It is my conviction that the transparency that is the opening of internal processing and decisions of one institution/organization to others might they involve or not in the decision-making is a right to promote and defend because it allows a reversibility of information exchanges between the citizens and the political, social and economic leadership.

The principle of transparency which constitutes an improvement and a progress should be applied to the whole public management in order to improve the more useful relationship between administrations and citizens, thus stimulating the co-participation of citizens to their own development.
Thank you