



## **AFIC Welcomes the Coming into Effect of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance**

**Kampala, 30th January 2012**

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, signed by African states on January 30, 2007, goes operational after 15 African Union member states have ratified and deposited the instrument at the AU. These are: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mauritania, Lesotho and Nigeria. Others are Niger, Rwanda, South Africa, Sierra Leone and Zambia.

The coming into force of the Democracy Charter on February 15, 2012 is a significant development and of great relevance to the African continent. The past year and recent past saw the expression of desire for democracy and citizen participation in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

The Charter seeks to promote among others, adherence to the universal values and principles of democracy and respect for human rights; enhance adherence to the principle of the rule of law; holding of regular free and fair elections; prohibit, reject and condemn unconstitutional change of government and promote and protect the independence of the judiciary. The Charter also aims at promoting democratic culture and practice, effective coordination and harmonization of governance policies; sustainable development and human security; fight against corruption and the establishment of the necessary conditions to foster citizen participation, transparency, access to information, freedom of the press and accountability in the management of public affairs.

The centrality of access to information in the realization of its objectives explains why FOI advocates on the continent have dedicated time and resources to secure the required number of ratifications (15) for the text to go operational. One such effort was the organization in August last year of an Eastern Africa Regional Dialogue on the Ratification and Domestication of the Charter and advancement of the right to information organized by AFIC in

collaboration with the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa with support from the Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Deepening Democracy Programme. Participants adopted action plans to ensure ratification of the Charter in the region.

The entry into force of this Charter provides new opportunities for the advancement of accountability and good governance on the continent. In a previous article posted on AFIC's French site, AFIC argues that DR Congo's elections would have been better had the country ratified, domesticated and implemented the Democracy Charter considering that that country's electoral commission's credibility began to erode when it denied opposition leaders access to voters' registers. Its successful domestication and implementation could have also provided a cure for post election violence such as those experienced in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire.

In congratulating governments and citizens of countries that have ratified the Democracy Charter AFIC calls upon:

1. African Union member states that have ratified the Democracy Charter to domesticate and fully implement it to foster good and accountable governance;
2. Other African Union member states to fast track the ratification, deposition, domestication and implementation
3. All African Union member states to sensitise African citizens on the Charter and its provisions
4. The African Union to set deadline by which all member states should have ratified the Charter.

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Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) is a pan-African Civil Society Organisation and resource centre promoting the right of access to information on the African continent.