

Protocol of the
Workshop on Freedom of Information
January 24-25, 2002

On January 24-25, 2002, high-level members of government and the judiciary, members of parliament, civil society, journalists, and the international community discussed the principles of access to information and the benefits of adopting a law on freedom of information. Examples of current gaps and inefficiencies in the current situation in Armenia illustrated the need for a dedicated piece of legislation to guarantee access of information for all citizens as provided for in Article 24 of the Constitution of Armenia.

The participants in the workshop recognized that access to information is a process, a key element of which is the adoption of a law on freedom of information. It was further recognized that access to information is for all citizens. A freedom of information law will benefit both the government and society at large.

During the workshop, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. A freedom of information law should be adopted in Armenia. The law should be written to reflect the specific situation of Armenia, taking into account international standards.
2. During the drafting process, certain definitions and principles to be contained in the law need to be agreed upon.
3. A core working group to include members of parliament, government and civil society should work together to draft, adopt, and implement the law.
4. Other related laws in Armenia, such as the laws on data protection (when adopted), state secrets, and archives must be harmonized with the law on freedom of information.

5. Ideally, the core working group for the law on freedom of information should work on the harmonization of the other related legislation.
6. Concurrently to the drafting and adopting of the law on freedom of information, a public awareness campaign should be initiated and implemented throughout the country to educate the population and all levels of government as to the principles of freedom of information and the mechanisms for its implementation.
7. Sources which provide information, such as websites and internet access, need to be expanded to facilitate access to information. In addition, distribution systems within Armenia should be improved to ensure access of information for all regions and localities in Armenia.
8. Until Freedom of Information legislation is adopted, providing access to information is encouraged.
9. OSCE (Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe), ABA/CEELI (American BAR Association), the Freedom of Information Centre/Association of Investigative Journalists, Internews Armenia, OSI (Open Society Institute) commit themselves to supporting this process.