



PRESS STATEMENT

Apia, 13 October 2021 – *High-level dialogue on access to information in the public administration context*

Access to information empowers the participation of citizens in decision-making and discussions of issues that affect them. It is a key human right that enables the exercise of all other fundamental human rights and holds governments to account as well as promotes transparency and good governance. This was at the center of dialogue with senior officials of various government ministries and entities and the National University of Samoa spearheaded by the Office of the Ombudsman also the National Human Rights Institution of Samoa in collaboration with [UNESCO Pacific Office](#) and the OER Foundation under its Samoa Knowledge Society Initiative this week.

The Ombudsman reiterated in her remarks the responsibility of the Government through its institutions to proactively provide an enabling environment (through legislative and non-legislative measures) where official information is shared and made available to the public.

“Various issues were identified by the public and media on many occasions hindering their ability to access important official information. One of these issues includes the belief among public servants that information within their possession including annual reports, for instance, is confidential” Ombudsman, Luamanuvao Katalaina Sapolu

Ms. Nisha UNESCO Representative for the Pacific States emphasized the importance of the right of access to information to create a knowledge society which in turn can effectively contribute to development.

The high-level dialogue gave the opportunity to senior officials from the various institutions who took part to share on different aspects relating to access to official information including challenges, the types of information that should be made available as well as opportunities to promote this universal right within the public administration context.

Some raised that any information that concerns the use of public funds must be made readily available to the public subject only to certain reasonable exceptions such as national security and personal privacy. To determine the types of official information that can and cannot be shared it was expressed that Samoa needs to make clear the classifications for various information held by public institutions. It was also raised that to facilitate any sharing or

dissemination of information between public institutions and the public and media, robust processes supported by capacity building of those who will be responsible for managing and responding to information requests, need to be in place to ensure effective and timely response to such requests.

The outcome of the high-level dialogue will inform a follow-up training with public officials on access to information and its importance in promoting good governance which in turn will help safeguard the human rights of citizens.

The Office acknowledges the partnership of UNESCO and the Samoa Knowledge Initiative Society for supporting this work.



ENDS.