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ARTICLE 19 and the Right to Truth **Dr Agnès Callamard, executive director, ARTICLE 19**

ARTICLE 19 supports the Right to Truth around the world. The organisation considers that the right to know the truth about past human rights violations derives from the more general right of access to information, contained within the right to “seek, receive and impart information” which is guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The right to truth presupposes access to government-held information – without it, “truth” about past events is bound to be one-sided and lacking in evidence. If efforts to uncover the truth about the past are not to founder, it is vital that those undertaking investigations are able to obtain maximum access to public information. This means that fundamental reform of the legal regime governing freedom of expression is an essential precondition for meaningful efforts to uncover the truth about the past.

In 1993, ARTICLE 19 published a report entitled “Malawi’s Past: The Right to Truth” which was a response to a call by relatives of victims of political killings for a full investigation into past events.

This theme was revisited in 1998 when ARTICLE 19 worked on the truth commission process in Sierra Leone to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of freedom of expression issues, including access to information about human rights violations in the context of “truth processes”, and to strengthen public participation in monitoring, reviewing and shaping “truth processes”, through the building up of civil society’s knowledge-base and institutional capacity.

ARTICLE 19 also assisted in producing print and radio versions of a monthly Truth Bulletin, intended to promote public awareness and debate, which were widely circulated. A series of six provincial consultation workshops were held, bringing together stakeholders to review progress and identify problems in the TRC process. The project also involved an innovative networking component: a Sierra Leonean delegation traveled to Guatemala, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to explore community-level truth processes. Our networking partners for these missions were the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (South Africa) and the Amani Trust (Zimbabwe).

In August 2000, ARTICLE 19’s work on the right to truth in Sierra Leone was published in “Moments of Truth in Sierra Leone: Contextualising the Truth and reconciliation process” available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/sierra-leone-moments-of-truth.pdf>

In December 2000, ARTICLE 19 published “Who Wants to Forget? Truth and Access to Information about Past Human Rights Violations” which examined truth-seeking initiatives in three African countries: Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Both publications argued that the right to information about past human rights violations is fundamental and that governments have an obligation to ensure that citizens are able to gain access to relevant information. The publication is available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/freedom-of-information-truth-commissions.pdf>

In Kenya:

<http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/kenya-article-19-welcomes-adoption-of-truth-justice-and-reconciliation-commi.pdf>

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- For more information please contact: [Agnes](#) Callamard, +44 20 7324 2500
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.