

Catherine Ashton
High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

17th November 2010

Dear High Representative,

Subject: A common European position on Mutual Accountability and Transparency

We, the undersigned agencies, networks and organisations are writing to you as EU High Representative to ask you to use your vital leadership role in Europe to ensure that the European Union delivers on the commitments made at the High Level Forum in Accra in 2008ⁱ. In just over a year, at the next High Level Forum in Busan, the European Commission and Member States will have to demonstrate the progress they have made in making aid more effective and transparent.

The recent assessments of aid transparency across European countries by AidWatchⁱⁱ and Publish What You Fundⁱⁱⁱ have highlighted serious weaknesses in the transparency of aid information across Europe. We are concerned that current proposals to improve transparency (due to be discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council of 9th December) fall significantly short of the aid transparency commitments made at Accra and show a lack of commitment to European leadership on this important issue. Limited progress in improving transparency will affect the capacity to have an effective mutual accountability framework in place, and consequently curtail the role of civil society organisations to hold their governments accountable.

The EU position on mutual accountability and transparency will be an important element of the broader EU position for Busan. The EU must demonstrate renewed efforts to provide more timely and comprehensive information on aid spending. It is critical that this information is made available publicly within the framework of a common set of international standards so that the EU can compare and harmonise its efforts with other donors and align its aid with recipient governments' systems.

There is a need for a substantive political discussion on the role that the EU should be playing within international efforts to implement a common standard in aid transparency, such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative. Current discussions are focused on technical proposals (TR-AID) and reporting schedules which may support division of labour discussions between European donors but do not increase transparency to other key stakeholders, particularly recipient governments and civil society in the North and South. Without comparable and transparent information, at an international level, both donors and recipient governments will continue to face serious challenges to minimising duplication and maximising the impact of their resources.

We call on you in your role as High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in the European Union to ensure that aid and transparency are high on the agenda of European Development Ministers, giving the EU enough time to demonstrate some concrete progress at Busan in 2011.

More specifically, as part of the European commitment to improved aid effectiveness the EU's common position on mutual accountability and aid transparency must, as a minimum, include the following elements:

- Agreement for an information standard that delivers comparability both between donor countries as well as the alignment to needs of recipient countries by January 2011;
- Concrete and time-bound steps to disclose comprehensive and timely aid information in a way which is internationally comparable and compatible with recipient country systems;
- Concrete and time-bound steps to meeting the commitment to regularly make public all conditions linked to disbursements.

We are attaching AidWatch's most recent position paper "EU Aid Transparency: Stepping up to the challenge" and look forward to discussing these and other issues in greater depth at your earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories to this letter:

Access Info – Helen Darbishire, Executive Director

Access to Information Programme (Bulgaria) – Dr. Gergana Jouleva, Executive Director

Action for Global Health, Brussels – Monika Kosinska, Secretary General of the European Public Health Alliance

ActionAid – Laura Sullivan, European Policy and Campaigns Manager

Adventist Development and Relief Agency – Géraldine Vertallier, EU Director

ARTICLE 19 (UK) – Dr. Agnès Callamard, Executive Director

Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania - Helsinki Committee – Diana-Olivia Hatneanu, Executive Director

Association of German Development NGOs – Heike Spielmans, CEO

CAFOD – Neil Thorns, Director of Advocacy

Campaign for Freedom of Information (UK) – Maurice Frankel, Director

CARE International – Marcy Vigoda, Deputy Secretary General

Center for Independent Journalism (Romania) – Ioana Avadani, Executive Director

Concord Denmark – Birte Hald, Chair

Concord Sweden – Björn Lindh, Chair

Coordination Sud – Jean-Louis Vielajus, President

Czech Forum for Development Cooperation – Pavel Gruber, Chair of the Executive Board

Dochas (Ireland) – Hans Zomer, Director

Ekvilib Institute (Slovenia) – Anita Ramsak, Director

Eurodad – Nuria Molina, Director

Eurostep – Simon Stocker, Director

Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights (Hungary) – Mr. Péter Pálvölgyi, Executive Director

Global Responsibility, Austrain NGO Platform – Petra Navara-Unterluggauer, Director

Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and Humanitarian Aid – János Tóth, Executive Director

Institute of Global Responsibility (Poland) – Marcin Wojtalik, Board member

Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation – Mara Simane, Director

Maltese Aid Watch Working Group – Michael Gatt, Coordinator

ONE – Eloise Todd, Brussels Director

One World Action (UK) – Carolina Gottardo, Head of Policy and Advocacy

OpenAid (Germany) – Claudia Schwegmann, Founder

Oxfam International – Elise Ford, Head of EU Advocacy

Portuguese NGDO Platform – Pedro Cruz, Executive Director

Publish What You Fund – Karin Christiansen, Director

Slovak NGDO Platform – Nora Benakova, Chairman of the Board

Slovenian Platform for Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid – Aleš Kranjc Kušlan, Director

Spanish NGDO Platform – Eduardo Sánchez Jacob, President

Transparency International – Christiaan Poortman, Director of Global Programmes

UK Aid Network – Gideon Rabinowitz, Coordinator

World Vision – Marius Wanders, Director, World Vision EU Liaison Office

Also supported internationally by:

Africa Freedom of Information Centre– Gilbert Sendugwa, Coordinator and head of Secretariat

African Network of Constitutional Lawyers – Fatima Diallo, Member of the Working Committee on Access to Information

Arab Freedom of Information Network – Said Essoulami, President

Armenian Freedom of Information Center – Shushan Doydoyan, President

Centre for Law and Democracy (Canada) – Toby Mendel, Executive Director

Citizens' Campaign for Right to Information (Nepal) – Tanka Aryal, General Secretary

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (India) – Venkatesh Nayak, Programme Coordinator

Environmental Law and Economics Institute (Paraguay) – Ezequiel Santagada, Executive Director

Freedom Forum Nepal – Taranath Dahal, Chairperson

Informational Policy Institute (Moldova) – Alex Marciuc, Director

Institute for Information Freedom Development (Russia) – Dr. Ivan Pavlov, Chair of the Board

Jamaicans for Justice – Dr. J. Carolyn Gomes, Executive Director







Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative





Réseau des Constitutionnalistes Africains
African Network of Constitutional Lawyers



This letter has been copied to:

- cc. Charles Michel, Minister for Development, Belgium
- cc. Koos Richelle, Director General EuropeAid, European Commission
- cc. Fokion Fotiadis, Director General DG Development, European Commission
- cc. Permanent Representatives to the European Union
- cc. European Directors General Development/MFA

ⁱ Commitments made on aid transparency at the High Level Forum at Accra are:

24 (a) “Donors will publicly disclose regular, detailed and timely information on volume, allocation and, when available, results of development expenditure to enable more accurate budget, accounting and audit by developing countries.”

25 (b) “Beginning now, donors and developing countries will regularly make public all conditions linked to disbursements.”

26 (b) “Beginning now, donors will provide full and timely information on annual commitments and actual disbursements so that developing countries are in a position to accurately record all aid flows in their budget estimates and their accounting systems.

26 (c) Beginning now, donors will provide developing countries with regular and timely information on their rolling three- to five-year forward expenditure and/or implementation plans, with at least indicative resource allocations that developing countries can integrate in their medium-term planning and macroeconomic frameworks. Donors will address any constraints to providing such information”.

ⁱⁱ AidWatch Report 2010 ‘Penalty Against Poverty - More and better EU aid can score Millennium Development Goals’ at <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=25122>

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Aid Transparency Assessment 2010’ <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/>