Today, the African Union (AU) joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Day for Universal Access to Information 2021 under the theme “Building Back Better with Access to Information”.

The 74th UN General Assembly proclaimed 28 September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) in October 2019, although, the day had been proclaimed by the UNESCO General Conference in 2015. The theme of this year’s commemoration will highlight the role of access to information laws and their implementation in order to build back strong institutions for the public good and sustainable development, as well as to strengthen the right to information and international cooperation.

This commemoration is taking place in a difficult context as we are faced and challenged by the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is also a difficult time for the right of Access to information as it is threatened around the world. Restrictions on access to information are attacks against democracy, and a clear violation of the human and peoples’ rights. The Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security wishes to call on all AU Member States to take necessary actions to improve access to information as a human rights.

The commemoration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information is a reminder to all governments of the world to respect their commitment to advance the promotion and protection of human and peoples’ rights. This year’s celebration is an opportunity for all Members of the International Community to reaffirm the importance of cherishing information as a public good. The theme recognizes the impact of building stronger institutions on our health, our human rights, democracies and sustainable development.

The Commissioner also would like to seize this moment to pay tribute to UNESCO for the role it continues to play in advocating for freedom of expression and access to information, from the adoption of the landmark Windhoek Declaration of 1991 to date. It would be fitting at this juncture to also recognize the role played by the Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, noting with acknowledgement and encouragement the sterling work done in tracking the state of freedom of expression on the Continent.

The AU reiterate its commitment to promote the right of access to information despite the challenges faced at all levels. This commitment is underlined by the AU Theme of the year
2021, “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”, and it is in this context that the African Union Commission is committed to working closely with its Member States, African Civil Society Organizations such as the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), in close collaboration with UNESCO, to advance the promotion of access to information in Africa.