

Forum

Right to Information and its benefits to society on improving governance, transparency and accountability in Malaysia

Introduction

One of the most effective tools in the fight against corruption is right to information – the public’s right to request and receive information from the government. Right to information is a long established principle and a cornerstone of international law. It has been heralded by the UN General Assembly as “a fundamental human right and a touchstone of all freedoms to the United Nations is consecrated”. By holding the government to account for their decision-making processes and public expenditures, right to information can increase government transparency and reduce any gaps that exist between official and public knowledge.

Information is the prerequisite for effective civil society participation and monitoring of government activities. Free access to information enables law-enforcement agencies, citizens, and the media to uncover cases of corruption and maladministration. More importantly, however, the transparency herewith achieved acts as a deterrent to bad governance as the risk of detection of illicit or otherwise questionable practices increases. Right to information is thus an essential element of sustainable corruption control.

Right to information encompasses three main elements:

- the public’s right to request information
- the government’s corresponding duty to provide the information requested
- an obligation on the authorities to proactively publish information of public interest at regular intervals.

Although exemptions to disclosures will exist, they should be subject to the overriding principle that all information should be disclosed, unless the harm caused by disclosure is greater than the public interest in accessing information. The information should be accessible in a user-friendly, cheap, quick and simple way and the government should be required to conduct ongoing training for government officials and educate the public on the right to information.

Forum objectives and aims

The ultimate aim of the Forum is to generate public support for a Right to Information law.

The Forum/Dialogue will:

- ❖ Introduce participants to the basic principles of Right to Information objective.
- ❖ Engage participants on how Right to Information can improve local governance.
- ❖ Promote the UN Convention on Anti-Corruption (UNCAC) and Right to Information as essential rights for a fair, transparent and accountable government.

Proposed Participants to be invited

- Bar Council representatives
- Representatives from the electronic, print and broadcast media
- State government officials
- NGO representatives
- State Anti Corruption Agency
- Resident's association
- Academics
- Businesses
- Public

Forum Format – Half Day Forum (Dialogue – Presentation and Q & A)

The session will begin with a presentation on the basic principles of RTI and where applicable, sharing of cases of local communities in their efforts to access public information. This will be followed by a discussion through questions and answers. Sessions that begin in the morning can end with a light lunch, while those starting later can incorporate refreshments for the forums.