

# RIGHT TO INFORMATION GUIDE-2



## Right to Know Day



Since :1993

Right to Information Advocacy & Research Centre

CONSUMER RIGHTS EDUCATION & AWARENESS TRUST (CREAT)

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## **What is Right to Know Day?**

The Right to Know Day is an event which, is celebrated to mark the right of individual access to information held by public bodies and marks the benefits of transparent, accessible Government.

### **When is the Right to Know Day celebrated?**

From 2002, 28<sup>th</sup> September is observed as Right to Know Day. Organisations involved in freedom of information from various countries around the globe met at Sofia, Bulgaria, and created a network of Freedom of Information Advocates (FOIA Network) and agreed to collaborate to promote the individual right of access to information and open, transparent governance. They proposed that the date be dedicated to the promotion of access to information worldwide. The FOIA network chose the annual commemoration of this event in order to symbolize the global movement for promotion of Right to Information.

However, in the United States of America, freedom of information day is celebrated on 16<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Where is Right to Know Day celebrated?**

The event was first celebrated in Sofia, Bulgaria. Since then it has extended to more than 80 nations interested in adoption of their own government information access laws. Countries where the Right to Know Day is being celebrated include Argentina, Czech Republic, El Salvador, India, Jamaica, Latvia, Mexico, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Peru, Spain, Turkey and the USA.

## **Why Celebrate Right to Know Day?**

The aim of celebrating Right to Know Day is to raise awareness of every individual's right to access to government held information, the right to know how elected officials are exercising power and how the tax payer's money is being spent. It is also a day on which freedom of information activists from around the world can use further to promote this fundamental human right and to campaign for open, democratic societies in which there is full citizen participation in government.

The Right to Know Day is celebrated to highlight the importance of access to information. Some of the benefits of access to information are:

- Access to information provides individuals with knowledge to address public issues, scrutinize government and become active participants in democratic process
- Access to information has revealed and clarified the basis for government decisions, disclosed environmental and health dangers and shed light on error, mismanagement and illegal activities
- Access to information has required improved records management, prompted routine disclosure to information, promoted the duty to assist the public and resulted in better government service and efficiencies
- Access to information requires vigilance. Beyond simply having access to information legislation there must be a commitment to a culture and spirit of openness.
- There have been many successes as a result of access to information and there are improvements to consider

## **How to Celebrate Right to Know Day?**

There are a number of ways to celebrate the Right to Know Day. Given the fact that access to information is a human right and every individual is impacted by having or not having access to information, every citizen can plan to celebrate the Right to Know Day. Here are some events that could be organized depending on who you are:

### **For individuals**

Read or write an article on access to information

Host or attend a public forum to hear speakers on the subject

Participate in a poster, debate or essay contest

Prepare applications seeking information and file it with Public Authorities

Visit a library or an organization where you can browse through materials on Right to Information

Write to your local councilor or Member of State Assembly, Member of Parliament and ask them what they are doing to promote government transparency in general and right to information in particular

### **For Civil Society Organisations**

Civil society organizations like Right to information activist groups, women's organizations, consumer organizations, chambers of commerce, student unions, trade unions etc. can hold a variety of events on the occasion of Right to Know Day. Some of the events relevant to civil society organizations are:

- Conference on the Right to Information Act and how to use it
- Release of reports of surveys conducted, applications filed, information obtained etc.
- Presentation of awards to individuals and institutions who have done excellent work in promoting right to information among the people and the public authorities
- Identifying the best Public Authority in implementing the Right to Information Act & giving them an award in recognition of their work
- Writing articles in the media
- Distributing pamphlets, stickers and other materials
- Announcing a Negative Award for institutions not fulfilling their obligations under the relevant Right to Information laws
- Negative awards for the 'most ridiculous answer to an access to information request

### Events for others

**If you are a teacher** arrange a discussion in your school/college about the citizens' right to know and why open government is important.

**If you are a media person or a journalist** write an article on Right to Know Day or right to information law. If you have never filed a request before using your national access to information law, now is the time to start, and then make a story out of what happens. Visit a few public offices and find out what steps they

have taken to implement the Right to Information Act. Make an analysis and publish it. Similarly visit an NGO and see what they have done to promote Right to Information. Lend your support.

**If you're an Information Commissioner** join in the publicity for the day by holding an event or issuing a press release. Publicize examples of information disclosure that has helped strengthen the relationship between the public and the Government. Send a memo to Government Departments reminding them that 28<sup>th</sup> September is International Right to Know Day and emphasizing that transparency is nothing to be afraid of because everyone is doing it

**If you are a public servant or elected member** ask yourself what you are doing to help promote open government. Find out what the department you work in is doing to be more open. Think about how you can manage information better so that it's easier to provide to members of the public. Put some more information on your website so that the public has a better idea about what you are doing. Talk to the people in your department who are responsible for giving out information and find out what you can do help them respond to requests within the timeframes established by the Right to Information Act.

If you are still not sure what to do search the internet for the phrase 'Right to Know Day' or contact us at :

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