New African Digital Rights Coalition Aims to Hold Governments and Private Sector Accountable

Civil society organisations join forces to establish, promote and protect digital rights across the African Continent

A diverse group of nine digital rights organisations across the four cardinal points of the African continent today announced the formation of a coalition to advance digital rights in Africa - the African Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA). The announcement was made during the 2020 gathering of the Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa – FIFAfrica.

AIRA seeks to integrate evidence-based research, policy and legislative reform, multi-stakeholder advocacy and strategic litigation through joint efforts aimed at advancing affordability and access to the Internet, media freedom, privacy and data protection, access to information, freedoms of assembly, expression and media in Africa.

With more than half a billion Africans accessing the internet and using digital technologies, AIRA envisions an Africa where digital rights are upheld in all aspects of life, governance and the economy, ensuring equity and prosperity for all.

"AIRA was largely borne out of the need for movement building in campaigns for universal access and tackling inequalities and human rights challenges faced by Africans online, which are reflected offline. These challenges vary country by country, sub-region by sub-region and indeed, from one user to the next. However, norm setting requires a unified approach and platforms for collaborative learning and engagement – which AIRA seeks to do, in tandem with other pre-existing digital rights coalitions," said CIPESA Executive Director Wairagala Wakabi.

AIRA members include Amnesty International, ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa, BudgIT, the Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT), Co-Creation Hub (CcHUB), the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), the Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), Legal Resource Centre (LRC), and Paradigm Initiative (PIN).

"The AIRA coalition is uniquely positioned to undertake value-based, collective interventions and executes strategic initiatives that engage the government, private sector, media and civil society to institute and safeguard digital rights. Instructively, one limb of our multi-faceted digital rights work encourages government to espouse our four values – accountability, transparency, integrity and good governance – as they roll out inevitable digital policies and action plans," said KICTANet Convenor Grace Githaiga.

"AIRA members vocalise the needs and challenges of millions of individuals across Central, East, Southern and West Africa, including individuals who remain disconnected from the digital sphere, those at risk of being disconnected, and those who are already connected, albeit poorly," said Legal Resources Centre Legal Researcher Edwin Makwati.

"In the face of COVID-19, Internet shutdowns and stifling of dissent, digital rights across Africa are under threat more than ever before. AIRA is prepared to pool its experience and expertise to advance digital rights and well positioned to hold governments and the private sector accountable for any violation of those rights," said Amnesty International Technology Advisor Kiggundu Mark.

"Together, we can do so much," said Paradigm Initiative Executive Director 'Gbenga Sesan. "We invite others to join us in the movement to establish, advance and protect digital rights for all on the African continent."

About AIRA
The African Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA) undertakes collective interventions and executes strategic initiatives to promote privacy and data protection, affordability and access to the internet, access to information and freedoms of assembly, expression and the press. Learn more at AIRA.africa.

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