

PRESS RELEASE

Data Protection Africa Summit calls for the harmonization of African Data Protection laws through the development of a harmonized framework that will inform respective data protection laws. The Summit has also called on African policy makers, Governments and relevant stakeholders to urgently integrate data protection considerations; in the development and implementation of national identity and addressing systems; and deliberations on the African Single Digital Market.

Experts drawn from regulatory authorities, government representatives, advocacy groups, the private sector, multinational companies and industry associations shared their desire for a continent-wide data protection/privacy framework and recognition by African governments of the critical role of data protection in the digitalization agenda.

Balacava, Mauritius, November 23, 2018 --- A multi-stakeholder Focus Group at the first ever Data Protection Africa Summit has called for African governments, policy makers and other stakeholders to prioritize privacy and data protection issues as part of digitalization initiatives including the creation of a Single Digital Market for the continent and implementation of national Identity and addressing systems.

The African Dialogue meeting on the sidelines of the Summit also called for the harmonization of data protection laws of the various countries in Africa to enhance citizens' rights and free flow of data within the continent to promote economic prosperity.

A Digital Single Market for Africa

The Focus Group on the role of data protection in facilitating the Africa Single Digital market applauded ongoing efforts aimed at creating a Single Digital Market to complement the recently signed AfCFTA. The Group acknowledged the importance of removing barriers that inhibit the free flow of data within the continent to allow for the use of digital tools/services that enable e-commerce and Cloud related services to create and drive economic development and inclusion.

They however recognized that Data Protection is crucial to gain the trust of citizens in Africa if African citizens and governments are to fully benefit from this digital transformation and have urged the need for regulatory alignment and interoperability for personal cross-border data to flow, be processed and stored unimpeded across borders within Africa, and between Africa and the rest of the world.

The Group was mindful of the need to build capacity and develop policy/guidelines for data protection. In this regard there are plans to develop policy/guidelines and engage strategic stakeholders at different

Address: 21 Samora Machel Rd. Asylum Down
P. O. Box LA 329, Accra - Ghana

Email: info@africadigitalrightshub.org | **Website:** www.dataprotectionafrica.org

Tel: +233-302-909482 | +233-209-401192

 **Data Protection Africa Summit**

 **@dpasummit**

levels to facilitate the cementing of data protection as a cornerstone of the Single Digital Market initiative. The Focus Group would also submit a series of papers to provide expert opinion and guidance to relevant stakeholders.

National Identification and Address Systems

The Focus Group discussed digital identity and addressing, recognizing that national identification (ID) and addressing systems will empower Africans – irrespective of their economic status, ethnicity, location or financial situation – to benefit from the burgeoning digital economy. The Group was also of the conviction that digital identity is crucial for doing business, facilitating inclusion and creating access to social services for all citizens.

The Group, aware of the risks associated with such systems, stressed the need for governments and policy makers to ensure that adequate data protection and privacy safeguards are put in place prevent abuse and misuse of personal information.

Steps must also be taken to ensure accuracy and reliability of the information collected (data quality), the interoperability of systems and the adherence to other fair information principles and information security measures. The Group recommended that moving forward, information sharing parameters within government must be clearly defined in accordance with applicable laws, data protection frameworks and best practices to regulate information sharing within governments and between governments and the rest of the world.

The Group was of the opinion that the interests of individual citizens should at all times be the paramount consideration. To facilitate this objective the Group would in the coming months develop a code of practice on ensuring data protection for the creation, development and use of national IDs and databases, digital identification and national addressing systems.

African Dialogue on the harmonization of Data Protection Laws

As the continent strives for economic prosperity, the African Dialogue (comprising regulatory authorities, advocacy groups, multinational companies and industry associations) deems it imperative that data protection laws are harmonized across Africa. The Dialogue were of the view that a harmonized framework must address the peculiar cultural, legal, cultural, political, economic needs of the African landscape, without compromising accepted international standards of data protection. They also emphasized that the approach to achieving harmonization must be driven by consensus that is practical, enforceable and relevant to the continent.

The African Dialogue noted that to date only 17¹ out of 55 African countries have enacted data protection laws, with a few more undergoing the process of legislation. The continent meanwhile continues to

¹ Correct as at July 2018 when Botswana passed its Data Protection Act, 2018

Address: 21 Samora Machel Rd. Asylum Down
P. O. Box LA 329, Accra - Ghana

Email: info@africadigitalrightshub.org | **Website:** www.dataprotectionafrica.org

Tel: +233-302-909482 | +233-209-401192

 **Data Protection Africa Summit**

 **@dpasummit**



miss out on massive investment opportunities for the digital economy, while many citizens' fundamental rights to privacy are left open because of the lack of comprehensive data protection laws in majority of countries.

To this end the African Dialogue would continue to identify and engage relevant stakeholders on the need to harmonize data protection laws on the continent. The Dialogue further called for the resourcing and strengthening of data protection authorities on the continent to enable them to facilitate the process of bringing Africa up to global standards of data protection to benefit from the enormous potential of the global digital economy.

Data Protection Africa Summit

The Data Protection Africa Summit aims to build capacity, facilitate collaboration, showcase expertise and explore the issue of data protection/privacy on the African continent by creating an enabling environment for the collection and use of personal data as a strategic and critical resource for socio-economic development in the 4th Industrial Revolution. The summit is organized by the Africa Digital Rights' Hub.

About the Africa Digital Rights' Hub

The Africa Digital Rights' Hub is a not-for-profit think tank registered in Ghana that advances and promotes research and advocacy on digital rights across the African continent. Interested in the impact of digital technology on people living in the Continent, the Hub brings together academic researchers, stakeholders, policy makers, regional and international bodies to address digital rights issues in Africa.

Address: 21 Samora Machel Rd. Asylum Down
P. O. Box LA 329, Accra - Ghana

Email: info@africadigitalrightshub.org | **Website:** www.dataprotectionafrica.org

Tel: +233-302-909482 | +233-209-401192

