



## NEWS STORIES

# EU discusses democracy and universal access to information in Uganda



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On 26 September 2018, Uganda Christian University in Mukono hosted an EU-supported debate to jointly celebrate **International Democracy Day and International Universal Access to Information Day 2018**. The theme of the debate was 'Media for Democracy: how civic technologies can help foster strategic partnerships between civil society and the Government of Uganda'.

The debate was kicked off with a panel consisting of representatives of Ugandan civil society, government and media,, tackling issues around **recent clashes** between the public and private sphere in Uganda. More than 150 students showed up to **actively partake** in the ensuing discussions on the current state of **civic space** in Uganda, how media and civil society can operate within such a frame, and how to improve development through dialogue and partnership between public institutions, media and civil society actors. Ugandan participants in the EU global competition '**Civic Tech 4 Democracy**' were also present on the panel to offer their input on how to use civic technology to enhance access to information and accountability.



Uganda Christian University students attend in big numbers the EU organised democracy day debate

Professor Mary Sonko, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, opened the debate with European Union Head of Delegation to Uganda, H.E. Ambassador Attilio Pacifici, providing the official opening remarks. Ambassador Pacifici highlighted how the

**European Union is built on and committed to promoting democracy** at home as well as abroad. The Ambassador stressed that the debate was not aimed at pointing fingers but rather to facilitate a **constructive, mutually beneficial dialogue between relevant stakeholders**. Pacifici praised Uganda for being one of the first African countries to adopt Access to Information legislation and noted how, globally, democracy and access to information has improved throughout the last 25 years. As citizens elect public bodies, which are sustained by taxpayers, the public has a **right to know how power is exercised and how public money is spent**. However, this type of transparency and accountability requires mutual trust and cooperation between public institutions, civil society and the media.

The **need to foster strategic partnerships** is ever more relevant in light of recent tensions between the public and private sector in Uganda, the shrinking of civic space, and the increased challenges of 'fake news' spreading false information to the public, Ambassador Pacifici said, encouraging the audience to actively participate in the discussions. "The **European Union is committed to addressing these challenges hand in hand with all stakeholders**, the Government of Uganda, Ugandan civil society and Ugandan media".



Group photo including panelists, hosts Uganda Christian University, EU Delegation staff and Ambassador Pacifici at the conclusion of the debate

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