

15 April 2020

To: All Media

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Information Commissioner Supports Statement by  
International Conference of Information Commissioners on COVID-19**

The impact of COVID-19 brings unprecedented challenges for Bermuda, both nationally and globally.

During its most recent meeting, the sixteen members of the Governance Working Group of the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) adopted a statement which acknowledges the challenges public authorities are facing, but reiterates the importance of the right to access information.

Information Commissioner Gitanjali Gutierrez is a member of the ICIC Governance Working Group and supports the ICIC statement, available on the ICIC website [www.informationcommissioners.org/covid-19](http://www.informationcommissioners.org/covid-19):

The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) brings unprecedented challenges for our society, both nationally and globally.

Public authorities must make significant decisions that affect public health, civil liberties and people's prosperity.

The public's right to access information about such decisions is vital.

As a global community, we recognise that resources may be diverted away from usual information rights work. Public organisations will rightly focus their resources on protecting public health, and we recognise our role in taking a pragmatic approach, for example around how quickly public bodies respond to requests.

But the importance of the right to access information remains.

Public bodies must also recognise the value of clear and transparent communication, and of good record-keeping, in what will be a much analysed period of history.

As an international network, the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) supports a flexible approach that takes into account the compelling public interest in the current health emergency, while safeguarding the values of the right to access information. We ask governments to support this vision.

We add our support and gratitude to those who are dedicated to tackling the current pandemic.

Commissioner Gutierrez stated, “For Bermuda to survive this pandemic and thrive in our future, all residents must have access to factual, timely and actionable public information from Bermuda’s decision makers.

In the last few weeks, the impact of COVID-19 upon individuals’ health and financial well-being has increased and led to heightened stress and pressure within our community, including upon Government leaders. Ongoing questions and public debate are also growing about the most effective response to COVID019. In face of this, the Government must continue to provide transparent and accurate communications.

Public information must also reach every corner of our island in every accessible format. Even the most technologically disadvantaged within Bermuda must receive the same public information as those that are technologically savvy. Transparency and engagement with the public will promote the possibility that every corner of our community collectively responds in a manner that enables Bermuda and its people to emerge from this pandemic prepared and healthy.

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Editor’s Notes:

The Information Commissioner’s Office is an independent public office responsible for promoting the use of and overseeing compliance with the Public Access to Information (PATI) Act 2010. The PATI Act gives the public a right to access records held by public authorities, subject to listed exemptions and administrative grounds for denial of access. Individuals who are dissatisfied with the response of a public authority may seek a review by the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner shall investigate and the decisions by the Information Commissioner are legally binding.

Further information about the Information Commissioner’s Office is available at [www.ico.bm](http://www.ico.bm).