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Declaration of the International Council on Archives on the reclassification of documents and limitations to their access

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The [Universal Declaration on Archives](#) produced by the International Council on Archives (ICA) and adopted by UNESCO on 30 November 2011 states that “Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens’ rights and enhances the quality of life.” Consequently, all those who support the Declaration undertake to work together to ensure that “archives are made accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users”, and that “archives are used to contribute to the promotion of responsible citizenship.”

The International Council on Archives therefore calls the attention of the authorities, archivists and all individuals committed to these values to the need to condemn the unfortunately growing number of cases of archives previously made accessible but later arbitrarily reclassified as restricted.

Reclassification compromises the right to know the truth and to reparations, harms citizens by preventing access to archives and attacks democracy and its values. Democratic transparency and the right to conduct investigations into accountability for acts require constant vigilance in all countries.

Good practices with regard to access to archives, such as those defined in the Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information (the Tshwane Principles), run counter to the very idea that archives already made public should be reclassified or altered to refute what is recorded in them. This type of reclassification is even less acceptable if the archives concerned were created by agencies that no longer exist or by political regimes since vanquished but which were known in the past for their massive human rights violations.

The International Council on Archives believes that archivists and their national associations are in a position to raise government awareness of the need to reverse these reclassification decisions, by explaining that managing records and making archives available are powerful tools for building strong democracies and fairer societies and for preventing serious crimes from going unpunished.