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## Foreword

The *Africa Reader on Information Ethics* is based on papers presented at the First Africa Information Ethics conference that took place under the patronage of UNESCO, on 5–7 February in Pretoria, South Africa. It was co-organised by the University of Pretoria, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the International Centre for Information Ethics (ICIE), and was fully sponsored by the South African government. In addressing the ethical challenges of the information society on the African continent, the conference was inspired by the Geneva Declaration adopted by the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva in 2003. It was explicitly conceived as part of the implementation of Action Line C10 of the Geneva Plan of Action.

The idea of this conference emerged during 2004 at an international symposium on information ethics organised by ICIE and sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation in Karlsruhe, Germany. Leading international experts in the field of information ethics were invited to participate and it was a first of its kind in the world. The symposium focused on the new and challenging ethical questions raised by modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) within the paradigm of globalisation and knowledge economies. Themes discussed included issues such as privacy, access to information, intellectual property rights, quality of information, security, spamming, advanced capitalism, and the digital divide. During this symposium, the following became clear:

- The African continent was not well represented at the symposium in Germany. There was only one representative from South Africa and two other Africans, who live in Europe. There are, of course, many reasons why African scholars were not present. Some of these relate to the mere fact that the scholars were unknown to other international scholars. Lack of funding to attend international events was, and still is, a further serious stumbling block.
- There is an urgent need to research thoroughly the ethical challenges that the introduction of modern ICT poses to the African continent. Not much has been published on the role that African philosophy can play to reflect on these new challenges. Most research from a philosophical perspective takes its departure from the traditional Western philosophical paradigm. Research on how, for example, the African notion of *ubuntu* can affect the interpretation and application of intellectual property rights legislation in Africa is but one example. Other examples may include a study on the African view on human rights – how it would impact on an “African privacy” view.

One of the direct outcomes of the symposium held in Germany was a decision to proceed to investigate and plan an Africa Information Ethics conference in order to integrate leading African scholars into the international ethics debate and start reflection on the impact of ICTs on Africa’s cultures, daily life and moral traditions, and to what extent this impact is changing opportunities for development in different areas, i.e. integrating the economic, political and technological debate. More than 80 scholars from Africa and other parts of the world attended the conference in Pretoria. The proceedings were first published in the *International Review of Information Ethics* (IRIE), Volume 1 of 2007 (<http://www.i-r-i-e.net/issue7.htm>).

Besides the intercultural dialogue between scholars from Africa and around the globe, the conference produced a number of tangible results:

- The Tshwane Declaration was adopted by the participants of the conference as a genuine African contribution to the UNESCO Code of Ethics for the Information Society.
- The African Network for Information Ethics ([www.africainfoethics.org](http://www.africainfoethics.org)) was established, giving African scholars a platform for exchanging and realising their ideas in the field.
- The proposal was made to implement advisory boards to African governments, for giving advice to policy makers on the continent regarding the ethical implications of ICTs.
- The *Africa Reader on Information Ethics*, consisting of a selection of useful articles, is to be translated into main African languages. Future planning includes the development of a curriculum in African information ethics by African scholars, which can be used at universities on the continent that teach information ethics.

- A workshop on the ethical challenges African governments face with regard to the implementation of e-government in their respective countries was held in February 2009, and was jointly sponsored by UNESCO, the South African Department of Communications and SAP Systems. Future workshops in different African countries are being planned.

This publication is a clear illustration of our efforts to contribute to this important debate. We trust that this reader will serve as a textbook for students, scholars and all who have an interest in, and want to make a contribution to, the development of an African information ethics.

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