

## Welcome Remarks of the Chief Justice of Rwanda in a meeting with the Chief Justice of Sierra Leone and his delegation – 23th August 2022

Your Lordship Chief Justice, Desmond Babatunde Edwards, Chief Justice of Sierra Leone;

Hon. Deputy Chief Justice of Rwanda

Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone

Distinguished members of the Sierra Leone's delegation;

Dear colleagues from the Rwandan Judiciary

Members of the Press present,

It is an honor and a pleasure to welcome you to the Supreme Court, and wish you a productive week ahead and an enjoyable stay in Rwanda.

Your visit is a testimony of our mutual interest to strengthen cooperation among institutions that administer justice in order to uphold the rule of law in our respective countries. It is also a good opportunity to strengthen collaboration between our judiciaries and exchange views on judicial reforms, best practices and how to overcome challenges faced by our judiciaries in delivering timely and quality justice to our respective citizens.

As we are all aware, courts provide different judicial services to the public and satisfying the public *requires consistent judicial reform which must be undertaken in ways that are responsive to the expectations and needs of the public. Only in this way, will the public trust and confidence be maintained and enhanced.*<sup>1</sup>

In fact, any judicial reform should have as its objective the improvement of the quality of justice and the efficiency and effectivity of the judiciary, while strengthening and protecting the independence of judiciary, accompanied by measures to make more effective its responsibility and accountability. Another aim should be to bring justice closer to citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Nowadays, any meaningful judicial reform entails leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in justice administration. In the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda, originally with a civil law legal system, has undergone a transformation from purely civil law to a merger between the civil law and the common law. The evolutionary process led to the reform of several laws such as penal code, code of civil procedure, code of criminal procedure, law of evidence, as well as a number of commercial laws. The judicial structure has seen not only the establishment of new courts, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Judicial reform: What are the changes that should be implemented for the judicial system. Remarks at the Judicial Conference of the Supreme Courts of the G20, Buenos Aires, Argentina, by The Honorable Mr. Justice Adrian Saunders, President of the Caribbean Court of Justice. [http://www.ccj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Remarks-by-the-President\\_The-Judicial-Conference-of-the-Supreme-Court-of-the-G20\\_-20181008.pdf](http://www.ccj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Remarks-by-the-President_The-Judicial-Conference-of-the-Supreme-Court-of-the-G20_-20181008.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Judicial reform in the EU, By *European Network of Councils for the Judiciary*, <https://www.encj.eu/node/268>

commercial courts, and the Court of Appeal, but also the introduction of procedures, standards including academic and professional qualifications for all judges and other judicial officers.

In its effort to increase efficiency in the way justice administration delivers services, Rwanda has embarked on an ambitious program towards the digitalization of the justice sector. In fact, digital justice or specifically the digitization of court processes can build smarter justice systems through the incorporation of technology-based solutions such as machine learning, case management systems, process automation, online conflict management, legal research, litigation analysis, case prediction, and data visualization among others. Government stakeholders undertake the digitization of court processes to improve the productivity, consistency, case flow, and quality of e-justice systems.<sup>3</sup>

In order to digitize court processes, courts along with other key stakeholders in the justice sector must consider how different e-justice technologies affect the accessibility, legitimacy, legality and economy of judicial systems (cost effectiveness). Those judicial values are crucial determinants of the quality of justice and the adoption of e-justice technologies should depend on how they affect those values and ultimately improve the Judiciary's performance. In essence, digitization of court processes is vital to providing efficient and equitable justice, which means that the justice system is supported by digital technology that is reliable, accessible and cost-effective.

Regarding the experience of the Rwandan Judiciary in this regard, I must say that one of our strategic objectives as enshrined in the Strategic Plan 2018-2024, is to deliver timely and quality judgments by improving case management cycle; improve court service delivery by strengthening the use of Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS) and other court technologies.

My colleagues will have an opportunity to take you through activities that have been undertaken in digitizing court processes in Rwanda, a process that started in 2016 when an Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS) was rolled out first in selected courts before being extended to all courts in 2017. Today, IECMS integrates all the Justice sector institutions, that is the Judiciary with all courts, the National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA), the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), the Correctional Services, the Civil Litigation Service of the Ministry of Justice and the Rwanda Bar Association. It is a single point of entry for all justice sector institutions, automating workflow and facilitating real time and seamless information sharing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Frederic Drabo, *The Digitization of Court Processes in African regional and Sub Regional Judicial institutions*, p. 2, 2021, <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11691&context=dissertations>

<sup>4</sup> Niceson Karungi, *Managing Change for Court IT Administrators. Case Study: Rwanda Integrated Electronic Case Management System*, *The Court Administrator Journal*, Spring 2020, p. 8

The successful adoption of IECMS is largely attributed to the phased approach to deployment, and other strategies and factors that facilitated the smooth and successful adoption of the system, such as committed and supportive leadership; revision of procedural law; public communication strategy; etc.

There are, however, some challenges associated with IT infrastructure and literacy issues we are continuing to address in order to make the system more efficient.

Your Lordship Chief Justice and distinguished members of the Sierra Leone's delegation, our team will be available to share with you salient aspects of judicial reforms undertaken, being in civil, criminal and commercial justice as well as the rolling out of IECMS within different justice institutions and it is my hope that you will find this experience pertinent, but I can testify that the digitization of court processes has tremendously improved justice service delivery in Rwanda, especially during difficult times when the entire world was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic we continue to grapple with. We will also take this opportunity to learn from you since Sierra Leone has a well-established judicial system with a long tradition of common law and Rwanda has endeavored to emulate some best practices in different fields of law.

Your Lordship Chief Justice and distinguished members of the delegation, I wish you once again a productive week and an enjoyable stay in Rwanda. I thank my colleagues from the Rwandan Judiciary present for joining me in this session. Let's us all continue to work hand in hand to uphold the rule of law, to foster peace and sustainable development in our respective countries and beyond.

Thank you for your kind attention.