

Training Workshop of Journalists on Human Rights and Judicial Reporting – Opening Remarks by the Chief Justice / President of the Supreme Court

Excellency Ambassador of the European Union Delegation in Rwanda
Executive Director Legal Aid Forum
Chairperson Rwanda Media Commission
Distinguished participants

It is my pleasure to be here with you today to preside over the opening of a three-day's training workshop on professional *Legal Reporting in Open Court Proceeding*. As we all know, the rule of law is a key pillar of good governance in a democratic society and constitutes an integral and core element in every aspect of human development. The Judiciary and the media have always been close to each other in the providence of justice to all through promotion of human rights and democratic principles.

It has been recognized for many years that press reporting of legal proceedings is an extension of the concept of open Justice and is inseparable from it. In reporting what has been said and done at public trial, the media serve as the eyes and ears of a wider public which would be absolutely entitled to attend but for purely practical reasons cannot do so.¹ Thus, the media helps masses to keep abreast with what is happening be it in Court or elsewhere and with doing this a level of accountability is always achieved.

Through past years, Rwandan journalists of both print and radio have demonstrated eagerness in the aspect of reporting judicial activities especially on court cases and this has been pivotal in informing the general public what transpires in the Courts of law, something that is quite commendable.

Talking about information sharing that accrues into sensitizations that is usually done by journalists to citizens through legal reporting, one cannot omit

¹ Uk Court in *khuja v Times Newspaper Ltd*

the benefits that comes along with it, notably awareness that sometimes may lead to prevention or slowing down civil disputes and crimes.

After the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations developed more details on conditions for press freedom. These include the Convention on freedom of information as well as the Convention on International transmission of News and the Convention on the International right of correction. The rights to freedom of expression and access to information are also recognized under the Rwandan Constitution and other legislative instruments including Law N° 02/2013 of 08/02/2013 regulating media and Law No 04/2013 of 08/02/2013 relating to access to information which provides for the right to freedom of opinion and expression; there are also various precedents that have been laid down by Rwandan Superior Courts that guarantee freedom of expression.

The importance of media in today's world is evident from the fact that it has the power not only to influence the lives of ordinary people but institutions too including the Judiciary.

However, while media is at liberty to make and report news, it is also mandated to come up with stories and make choice of words that have a positive impact on people and society at large, it is with this back ground that this three-day training workshop will be of great importance to the media practitioners in attendance by equipping them with ample skills on how to disseminate judicial information in a clear correct and unbiased manner.

Talking about reporting with unbiased tendency, it is fair to say that the media can play a crucial role in denouncing some crimes that would have been unpunished without its intervention. But, it should be recognized that in some high profile criminal cases, the media ought to avoid instances in which it could be accused of conducting the trial of the accused and passing the *verdict* even before the court passes its judgment. As it appears, this *trial by media* is definitely an undue interference in the process of justice delivery,² and is a

² <https://www.lawteacher.net/free-law-essays/commercial-law/effect-of-trial-by-media-before-courts-law-essay.php>

menace to rule of law and fair Justice. However, we are confident that this training will help to increase participants' skills on how to report on court proceedings without interfering with the due process of law.

Back to the agenda, various themes have been organized which include: The organization and functioning of the judiciary, legal lexicons and legalese, ethical conduct of journalists reporting on Court cases with emphasis on subjudice, how to access information from courts and several others. Most of these themes may not be very new to most of you; however, a training workshop like this one is key for experience sharing and pondering on what to be corrected for the betterment of the future rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. Thus, we can confidently expect that at the end of this training, a lot will have been attained in terms of improving the standards and quality of information collection and dissemination on court proceedings.

I thus beseech all participants to make good use of these three-day training workshop and that the skills and best practices that will be attained be shared with the rest of your colleagues that were not able to attend; with that you will be giving back to the actual cause of this training.

I cannot close my remarks without thanking all those that contributed to the organization of this training workshop. Our gratitude goes first to the Legal Aid Forum and Rwanda Media Commission who, together with a team from the Judiciary, have worked tirelessly to see that this training happens. I also wish to thank the Delegation of the European Union to Rwanda for its financial support, the valuable resource persons that will be doing the various presentations and participants for making time to attend this workshop training.

It is on this note that I officially declare open the Workshop Training of Journalists on Human Rights and Judicial Reporting

Thank you for your kind attention.