

Welcome Remarks of the Chief Justice of Rwanda in a meeting with the President of the Supreme Court of justice of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe and his delegation – 19 May 2022

Honorable Dr. Manuel Silva Gomes Cravid, President of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe;

Honorable Dr. Cilcio Bandeira dos Santos, Minister of Justice of the DRSTP;

Distinguished members of the DRSTP's delegation;

Honorable Deputy Chief Justice and other colleagues from the Judiciary of Rwanda, present;

Dear President and distinguished members of the delegation;

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 reform, best practices and how to overcome challenges faced by our judiciaries in delivering timely and quality justice to our respective citizens.

As we all know, 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.*¹

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.²

¹ 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

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

Nowadays, any meaningful judicial reform entails leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in justice administration. In Rwanda like in many other countries, digital technology has been transforming the way government services work. In the case of the justice sector, ICTs not only offer a better way to perform existing practices but also present the potential for creating new practices and fundamentally changing the way justice administration delivers services. Digital justice or 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.³

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.

³ 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>

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.⁴

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.

Honorable President and esteemed members of the delegation, our team will be available to share with you our experience in rolling out 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.

Honorable President and distinguished members of the delegation, I wish you once again a productive week and an enjoyable stay in Rwanda. I thank the members of 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.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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