

Remarks at the Second Bilateral Meeting between the Judiciary of Rwanda and the Judiciary of Singapore held on 14 March 2022

Background

Hon. Sundaresh Menon, the Chief Justice of Singapore

Hon. Regis Rukundakuvuga, President of the Court of Appeal/Rwanda

Hon. Justice Steven Chong, Justice of the Court of Appeal

Distinguished Members of the Singapore Judiciary, present

Distinguished Members of the Rwanda Judiciary, present

The Dean of the Singapore Judicial College, Mr. Foo Chee Hock

The Rector of the Institute of Legal Practice and Development, Dr. Didas Kayihura

On behalf of the Judiciary of Rwanda, I would like to start by presenting to you, Hon. Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and the distinguished members of the Singapore Judiciary present at this platform, warm greetings from Rwanda and thanking you for finding time to participate to this bilateral meeting between our two Judiciaries. I also thank my colleagues from the Rwanda Judiciary and the Rector of ILPD for joining me in this meeting.

The judicial cooperation between Rwanda and Singapore sprouted out of the common desire of both countries to promote the administration of justice that translates the rule of law.

In order to make this tangible, the two Supreme Courts agreed to rely the cooperation on a friendly relationship and exchanges of experience, practices, know-how, etc... through training, visits and webinars in the field of administration of justice.

The materialization of the cooperation commitment between the judiciary of Rwanda and the judiciary of Singapore was effected by the signing of the Memorandum of

Understanding for judicial cooperation and the Memorandum of Guidance as to enforcement of money judgments. Afterward, the Rwandan side has established the Executive and Advisory Committees in charge of overseeing the implementation of this bilateral cooperation.

As the first memorandum's role is to avail the relevant information about the judicial process of execution of foreign court decisions already set by both countries' legislations in the matter, the enlightenment it contains is of utmost relevance for litigants who will be eventually having to seek the execution of their judgments in either country. Accordingly, its implementation is circumstantial since it depends on the availability of such judgments that need to be enforced under the terms of this guidance.

The second memorandum relating to judicial cooperation encompasses the substantial areas of cooperation of which implementation development and progress is worth mentioning.

Thus, the two judiciaries pledged to cooperate on matters of common interest mainly in:

- ✓ Electronic case management systems and administration;
- ✓ Court-annexed mediation and out-of-court mediation;
- ✓ Small claims procedures;
- ✓ Capacity building through online and face-to-face training, experiential learning and exchange programmes.

With regard to Electronic case management systems and administration, it is worth mentioning that Training on technology and court of the future as well as Virtual Discussions Forum were held from July 26 to 30, 2021 and November 18 to 22, 2021 respectively where Rwanda judiciary participants included selected staff from courts, IT and inspectorate of courts, and both sides exchanged practices of Case Management System/E- Court Management System: Effectiveness and Prospect and

IT Transformation/Innovative Responses to Emergencies such as COVID-19. Rwanda Judiciary wants to improve virtual court proceedings and we hope that with the assistance of and experience from Singapore judiciary, we will keep improving towards full and efficient virtual courts.

In order to make it happen, we need, learning from Singapore Court Technology and Latest Development, to phase in electronic signature not only for the trial bench but also for parties and legal counsel for the authentication of court decisions and parties' submissions, as well as equipment and experience for the digital recording system of hearings to enable e-Litigation and asynchronous hearings.

Besides that, the judiciary of Rwanda has in plan, as soon as there is a waiver of travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for an official visit of delegates to Singapore to learn more about the Singapore e-court experience.

Regarding court-annexed mediation and out-of-court mediation, the cooperation commenced at the same period mediation was being introduced in Rwandan judicial system where mediation directives were enacted and a mediation advisory committee was set up. Training of some court officers, advocates and other justice sector stakeholders were undertaken and in that direction, it is now possible to refer some cases to private mediators or recourse to court mediation whenever parties consent to the process.

Since the adoption of mediation, we witnessed the speeding of cases settlement and according to available figures, last judicial year cases settled through mediation increased to 42% compared to the preceding judicial year.

This being said, the Judiciary of Rwanda intends to leverage on the Singapore shared experience for future plans like integrating mediation into the existing electronic case management system and the usage of e-Mediation and we hope you will continue to give us a hand in the same direction.

Also of interest for us is the disposal of small claims.

After learning from Singapore judiciary about the small claims management, the judiciary of Rwanda has started drafting the “*small claim procedure bench book*” to elaborate on and provide complementary explanations to users. As of now, the document is pending finalization and validation.

In addition, from the experience of Singapore, the judiciary of Rwanda envisions the use of small claim filing form and small claim judgment form after adjusting them with Rwandan rules of procedure.

Hon. Chief Justice, distinguished participants, we are pleased to note that the cooperation between our two Judiciaries has started to yield some good results; we are looking to pursuing it in the area of judicial training on topics such as, Judicial outreach, ADR practices, Common Law and Use of precedent, adjudication of financial, tax and commercial disputes; adjudication of economic and financial crimes; commercial conflict of laws and international litigation.

We also aim at capacity building through postgraduate training in areas of interest for judges and other judicial officers, such as the LLM programs in Judicial studies as well as in some emerging fields of law.

The judiciary of Rwanda takes this opportunity to express gratitude to you, Hon. Chief Justice and the entire judiciary of Singapore for the continued dedication to share with the judiciary of Rwanda tremendous know-how that enable us to meet better standards in the dispensation of justice.

Thank you all for your kind attention.