

**Remarks by Dr. Faustin Ntezilyayo, Chief Justice of Rwanda at the
Opening Ceremony of the Conference Marking the 25th Anniversary
of the Rwanda Bar Association**

It is my pleasure to join you this morning in this opening ceremony of the Conference marking the Silver Jubilee of the Rwanda Bar Association. Witnessing such a memorable event has a particular meaning for me as someone who, in 1997, was privileged as Minister of Justice, to affix the seal of the Republic on the law establishing the then Kigali Bar Association which was replaced by the current Rwanda Bar Association in 2013.

As a brief look at the history of the Bar Association in Rwanda can attest, the tortuous road toward the creation of the Bar was challenging, but thanks to commitment of the Government and the support from different stakeholders, those joint efforts came to fruition. The establishment of the Bar was even significant considering that in the aftermath of the Genocide against the Tutsi, the justice system was left in limbo while demands on the justice sector to enhance capacity and undertake reforms in order to cope with the post genocide justice emergencies were the most pressing. Thus, there is a legitimate reason to gather today for this Conference on the theme: ***Rwanda Bar Association at 25: A Pillar of Human Rights Protection, Fair Justice and the Rule of Law in Rwanda.***

From its humble beginning with only 37 Advocates to its current state with 1440 members, the Rwanda Bar Association has continuously strengthened its capacity in order to enable Advocates to better fulfill their main role to guide their clients through the judicial system. In this regard, measures to nurture good collaboration between the Judiciary and the Bar have been taken since both institutions have to work hand in hand to uphold the rule of law as they strive to ensure access to quality and timely justice for all.

We commend RBA for its good achievements in its 25 years of existence. But given today's complex and dynamic environment, justice institutions, including the Bar, must raise their standards in order to cope with disputes that often involve technical, complex issues where specialized knowledge or training may be essential. Counsel, lawyers and judges have to be equipped to deal with such complex matters. Opportunities for their continuing education and development must be strengthened.

Beyond honing competence and legal skills, each legal professional must also strive to uphold highest standards in terms of ethics. A pressing need in this regard is to combat corruption as it violates the constitutive principles of any legal system. I would like to call up the Bar to team up with the Judiciary in order to eradicate judicial corruption that undermines confidence in our judicial system. This is critical in building a strong rule of law culture that fuels a legal and business environment that protects contracts and property rights, all of these being essential to attract foreign direct investment and multinational business interests as engine to drive our economic growth. Rwanda's aspiration to be a vibrant commercial and financial center requires nothing less than certainty of laws and certainty in their enforcement.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like once again to congratulate RBA for its silver jubilee and reiterate the collaboration and cooperation of the Judiciary since we believe that it is by working together that we will build a strong rule of law culture that is essential to foster peace, security and the development our country wants. I wish you all fruitful discussions during this Conference.

Thank you for your kind attention.