

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

P.O. BOX 160 KIGALI

**SPEECH BY THE GUEST OF HONOR IN THE OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE SIXTH AOMA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
KIGALI, MARRIOTT HOTEL, 28/11/2018**

Honorable Ministers,

The President of African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA),

The African Ombudsman and Mediators here assembled,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of International Organizations,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is my pleasure to be here to welcome you to Rwanda and be part of this opening session on behalf of H.E Paul Kagame, President of the Republic. Rwanda is very happy to receive you. Thank you for choosing us to host your Assembly. We are humbled and proud to play host to your assembly, more so because each guest we host leaves us better hosts than they found us. Thank you.

Permit me to thank you also for your work in serving the citizens of your respective countries by ensuring harmonious relationships between citizens and the administration. Duties of the Ombudsman consist of investigating citizen complaints and attempts to resolve them, through recommendations or mediation, as well as the identification of systemic issues that lead to poor service or breaches of citizens' rights.

The institution of the ombudsman, first established in Sweden in the year 1809 was designed to provide protection for the individual in a situation of substantial imbalance of power. Africa borrowed this practice in 1965 when, the United Republic of Tanzania established a Permanent Commission Enquiry (PCE) dealing with Good Governance, Maladministration and Human Rights. Today we have more than 40 Ombudsman/Mediators in Africa. Let me take this opportunity to encourage other African countries which do not have the institution to establish one. There is everything to gain and nothing to lose.

The Office of the Ombudsman in Rwanda is not an old institution; it was established in 2003. In the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi the Ombudsman office was thought of as an institution that would help in entrenching good governance, efficient administration, transparency and accountability. Inspired by the Swedish and African Ombudsman institutions, our Constitution of 2003 provided for the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman. In Kinyarwanda name for the office is Umuvunyi. This is borrowed from our feudal past. Umuvunyi was the person or office responsible for ensuring that citizens who needed access to the King or other authority to present their issues, usually grievances, got that access and their issues were then heard.

The special nature of the institution of the Ombudsman in Rwanda is in the fact that our single Office is in charge of a multiple functions. In addition to the “classical” Ombudsman functions to act as link between citizens and the administration, The Office of the Ombudsman deals with investigation and prosecution of corruption, annual declaration of assets, and monitoring compliance with the Leadership code of conduct, across both the public and private domains. We provide it with all the support necessary and the law gives the office power to enforce compliance. No public official is above the ombudsman’s reach.

Honorable Ministers,
Dear Ombudsman/Mediators,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this conference: “The Role of the Ombudsman/Mediators in Promoting Transparency and Accountable Governance in Africa” correlates with the dedication of the year 2018 by the African Union to “winning the fight against corruption as sustainable path to Africa’s transformation, as adopted by the AU Summit in Addis Ababa this year. It could, therefore, not have been addressed at a better time.

Agenda 2063 adopted by the African union reflects the vision of Africa’s socio-economic development and lays down an action plan for the achievement of this vision. At the core of this agenda is the realization of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens.

Aspiration number 3 is "An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law". Goal 12 of the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, provides that countries should have "capable institutions and transformed leadership in place at all levels.

A number legal instruments were elaborated to help Africa to build and achieve accountable governance including the AU Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption, the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Administration. Legislation related to Illicit financial flows (IFFs) in place includes the 2016 United Nations Coherent Policies for Combatting Illicit Financial Flows on the movement of illegally sourced money across (e.g. corruption, smuggling), its transfer (e.g. tax evasion), or its use (e.g. terrorist financing). An increasing number of countries have specific legislation on the prevention and prosecution of corruption.

Rwanda salutes your Institutions for standing up against injustice and the scourge of corruption.

Corruption undermines effectiveness in the delivery of services, leads to poverty and weakens the protection of the vulnerable. Because of this complex and multi-faceted nature, combating systemic corruption requires partnership and collaboration among public agencies, private sector and civil society, including the media. It's your duty as African Ombudsman/Mediators to ensure the realization and sustenance of a corruption free environment in Africa.

Transparency and accountable governance are important factors in the fight against corruption. Without information about rights and responsibilities, requirements and timeframe to deliver a service, the relationships between

providers and consumers of public services become unclear and conflictual. Once citizens have information and they know what is happening, they become empowered. As Ombudsman/Mediators, you stand in that critical space to ensure access to information in oversight capacity.

Only the power of the people can ensure there is accountability. People need to be informed and understand. It is an interactive process where the bottom-up is more important than the top-down. Accountability focuses on the ability to account for the allocation, use, and control of public assets in accordance with legally accepted standards. Public Officials are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions, and they ought to submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this transparency and accountability.

When we, public officials, tell people that we are accountable, we should not leave it at that. Public officials cannot oversight themselves. We want the Ombudsman to set up review sessions, to do regular follow up, to monitor and check how we are doing, and check how citizens are perceiving our conduct. So accountability starts your Institutions you and trickles all the way down and around.

I don't need to add that the holding of this noble public role demands that the Institutions you lead carry an even greater responsibility of probity.

Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Dear Ombudsman/Mediators,
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I hope this General Assembly will provide opportunity for all of you to share knowledge and international best practices. I also hope you will make time to visit more of Kigali and Rwanda. I guess you have been reminded that there is more Kigali beyond the Marriot and that you can walk, ride or drive anywhere you want, anytime of the day or night. You are just on one hill, here, you probably know that this is the land of 1000 hills, check around for some of the 999.

With these remarks, it is now my honor to declare the 6th Annual General Assembly of the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association officially opened.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and a pleasant stay in Rwanda.

God Bless you All.
