

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



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Remarks by the Hon. Minister of Justice/Attorney General at the diplomatic reception to commemorate the International Human Rights Day

- **Your Excellency, ONE UN Resident Coordinator, Mr.Lamin Momodou MANNEH**
- **Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic missions in Rwanda**
- **Fellow Representatives of the Government of Rwanda**
- **Development Partners of the Justice Sector**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen ;**

Let me take this opportunity to thank you, Resident Coordinator for your invitation to come and celebrate International Human Rights day with you. That you have extended to me this particular invitation two years in a row is significant and I don't take it for granted.

This year's theme "Our Rights, Our Freedoms Always" speaks volumes to all countries, to leaders and to the led. Peoples' rights and freedoms are indeed not Christmas or New Year presents. They are acquired at birth, enjoyed through life, sometimes beyond! Denial or interruption in this chain can be costly. Rwanda suffered denial in its most harmful state not too long ago. The cost was a million lives.

In recognition of Human Rights Day we have also chosen a national theme for this week which is to **"Continue to prevent, avoid and renounce domestic violence."**

Your Excellency One UN Resident Coordinator,

The Government of Rwanda continues to deliver on the obligation to respect, protect and defend the human rights of every Rwandan and every person living in Rwanda as is provided in our Constitution. Our Constitution provides the framework for those fundamental freedoms including all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Rwanda recognizes and is bound by those international human rights standards. Very often we strive to hold ourselves to an even higher standard. As a Government, we remain aware of the fact that our accountability must be to the Rwandan people first. In fulfilling this obligation we are constantly in search of new and innovative ways by which the respect, protection and defense of human rights directly feeds into the governance, rule of law and socio-economic development objectives of the Country.

International human rights day is a fitting opportunity to assess the developments we have made in achieving our human rights objectives. In particular it is a good time to reflect on the key developments since we were all gathered here last, exactly a year ago.

The essential role which respect, promotion and defense of human rights plays in good governance, political and socio-economic development cannot be underscored.

In the last year, Rwanda has made some modest progress in ensuring economic and social rights as well as civil and political rights for all Rwandans.

To highlight but a few of these:

In relation to Economic and Social Rights, we are well on our way to realizing our Vision 20/20 and EDPS 2. In that regard the national GDP holds steady at 7 percent since 2014 to date. Government revenue is now able to sustain 66 percent of the national budget, giving the people of Rwanda a level of access to economic freedom that was previously unimaginable. Extreme poverty has also been nearly eradicated in Rwanda and poverty has also been substantially reduced. The majority of Rwandans today have access to a form of health insurance and free 12-year basic education is guaranteed for all children. Rwanda also continues to have the highest representation of women in Parliament in the world. Rwanda has been ranked 6th worldwide in the World Economic Gender Gap Report 2015, up from 7th in last year's report and is the only African Country to appear among the top 10.

Reforms in the legal framework for the establishment and operation of civil society organisations as well as political organisations has seen exponential growth in the sector to the extent that there are now 1600 local organisations operating in Rwanda an increase from the 350 that existed in 2012. In addition there are 174 International Civil Society organisations registered in Rwanda. The Directorate of Immigration is currently overhauling its registration process to make it completely accessible online. Organisations will now be able to complete the registration process online without the need of physical presence at the registration offices.

Eleven (11) political parties are registered and continue to engage with the Government in our participatory democracy. As a result of these developments, the Rwandan public rates access to political rights and civil liberties at 73 percent and the level of participation and inclusiveness at 75 percent according to the Rwanda Governance score card.

One area that has clearly claimed its space is the fourth estate, the media sector. This is related to the many media trainings that were done by a number of development partners over the last several years but also, importantly, to the many reforms to the laws and policies regulating the media in Rwanda. One such development is the enactment of a specific Access to Information law which ensures that Government institutions are obligated to provide information upon request. Rwanda is one of 11 Countries in Africa that have such a law. Print, audio-visual and electronic media have expanded more than 5 fold in under four years. The quality and depth of content on our air waves is unprecedented.

As evidence of the effectiveness of this policy climate, Rwanda's World Bank CPIA (Country Policy and Institutional Assessment) score was boosted this year to 4.0 at the top of the list of all Countries in Africa. The CPIA rates countries on a scale in relation to four policy areas; economic management, structural policies, social inclusion and equity as well as public sector management and institutions. These positive developments in Rwanda have been attributed to the quality of governance since such quality is increasingly viewed as a transformational element for sustainable and inclusive development in any Country.

I am also pleased to note that in November, Rwanda successfully underwent a second Universal Periodic Review. Allow me to thank you most sincerely Your Excellency for your support and partnership which made our showing in Geneva satisfactory.

In this second cycle, Rwanda accepted 50 new recommendations for implementation over the next four years. We will continue to count on the excellent support received from our development partners in the past to ensure that all those recommendations are implemented.

In order to promote access to justice, the Ministry of Justice continues to decentralize services through the District Access to Justice Bureaus which are doing important work in ensuring access to quality justice at the local level. Their work is positively impacting citizens' perception of their rights, duties and obligations.

In addition, the framework for the operation of Abunzi has been overhauled to make them more efficient and to allow the Government to support their work better. Today each Abunzi committee has 7 members giving a total of 17, 741 mediators across the Country. Mediation in community conflict has assumed a dominant position so much so that litigation is now the exception.

The annual Legal Aid week held since 2009 has provided legal services, free of charge, to the poor and vulnerable groups in Rwanda as well as increasing public awareness of the available legal aid services amongst the population. As a result of an array of initiatives in this regard, Justice and the rule of law scored over 70 percent in the most recent Rwanda Governance score card.

Your Excellency Resident Coordinator, ladies and gentlemen,

It is probably fitting that I take this opportunity to brief this audience about the important and exciting times Rwanda is in right now. The Constitutional review process - where we Rwandans are busy exercising the most sacred and inalienable of rights-that of self-determination and the freedom to choose and decide how we are governed. What you are witnessing, ladies and gentlemen, is unprecedented citizen engagement and participation of writers, researchers, political parties, academics, media, professional organizations and ordinary citizens in a debate about our future.

You are also witnessing the participation of non-Rwandans; media, politicians, regional organizations, countries, development partners, the friendly or supportive, the not so supportive and the outright opposed. All are exercising the right to have their say.

You are also witnessing ownership. Rwandans will listen to every shade of opinion but they will, rightly, jealously guard their right to make choices about their future and be responsible for those choices all through.

This process is not just constitutional; it is an exercise of a fundamental human right which cannot be outsourced, and which no individual, country or group of countries, however able or friendly can exercise, guarantee and assume responsibility for on our behalf. Rwandans are happy and proud participants and determinants in the process because it entitles them to

secure for and by themselves a democratic, stable and socio-economically progressing nation for now and for the future.

Your Excellency Resident Coordinator,

Allow me to thank the One UN for the unreserved support to the Government in its efforts to promote human rights. Thank you once again for the invitation to celebrate International Human Rights day and thank you all for your kind attention.