

# SINGAPORE – RWANDA VIRTUAL SIGNING CEREMONY

## OPENING REMARKS

19 April 2021

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

Supreme Court of Singapore

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Chief Justice Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo,

Deputy Chief Justice Marie Thérèse Mukamulisa,

The President of the Court of Appeal, Dr Muyoboke Aimé Karimunda,

High Commissioner Your Excellency Jean de Dieu Uwihanganye,

Judges and officials from the Supreme Court of Rwanda,

Colleagues and distinguished guests,

1. Good morning. Thank you for joining us today and a very warm welcome to this virtual signing ceremony involving the judiciaries of Singapore and Rwanda. Let me begin by expressing my heartfelt appreciation to Your Excellency the Chief Justice Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo and your team for joining us today. It is an honour to meet Your Excellency and I am delighted that technology has enabled us to proceed with this event, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. We mark a historic moment today with the signing of two landmark documents between the Supreme Courts of Singapore and Rwanda – the Memorandum of Understanding for Judicial Cooperation and the Memorandum of Guidance as to the Enforcement of Money Judgments.

3. The first of these documents identifies four topics of mutual interest as areas of learning and exchange between our two courts. These topics, spanning from case management systems to small claims procedures, might seem simple at one level, but, in truth, they are fundamental to the operation of the justice machinery in any jurisdiction.

4. In Singapore, our own journey of judicial reform began about 30 years ago. As I recounted at another event recently, in the early 1990s we had a backlog of more than 2000 cases in the Supreme Court alone. That was a staggering number for a small country like ours, and cases would take many years before they were heard in court for the first time. But through efforts made over the years, we have modernised our judicial processes and systems, and dramatically improved the clearance rate for cases at all levels of our Judiciary. These efforts – such as the implementation of “e-Litigation”, our electronic case and document management system – have also laid the necessary foundation that facilitated the drastic but necessary shift to remote hearings that we undertook with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I understand that Rwanda has embarked on similar court reforms in recent years, including the launch of its Integrated Electronic Case Management System in 2016. The topics chosen under the Memorandum of Understanding are therefore especially apposite, and they will no doubt grow in importance as our courts adapt to the post-pandemic environment.

5. The second memorandum concerns the enforcement of money judgments and it marks a milestone in our judicial relations. The memorandum sets out in clear

terms, the requirements and procedures for enforcing money judgments of our respective courts in each other's jurisdictions. In doing so, it makes it easier, cheaper and more certain for commercial parties seeking to enforce obligations against counterparties and this underscores our commitment to supporting economic growth through and in tandem with the advancement of the rule of law. I am confident that the memorandum will form a critical part of the legal infrastructure that will support our cross-border businesses and ventures as they seek to leverage on the strength and depth of the Asian and African economic engines.

6. In the midst of an unprecedented pandemic, our willingness to come together to reach agreement on these two landmark documents demonstrates our Judiciaries' shared commitment to judicial excellence and the rule of law. Once again, I thank you, Your Excellency the Chief Justice Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo, for supporting and joining me at this signature event. I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the two teams who ably prepared these documents and came together to organise this event despite the restrictions in place. Let me also highlight and mention the special effort of the President of the Court of Appeal of Rwanda, Dr Muyoboke Aimé Karimunda, who I had the pleasure of meeting in Singapore in 2019 at the signing ceremony of the Singapore Convention and with whom we first discussed the ideas that have come to fruition today! This marks a new chapter in our bilateral relations, and I look forward to many more fruitful exchanges and collaborations between our courts.

7. Thank you very much.