

**REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**



**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE**

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**CSO's REFLECTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN RWANDA; RWANDA'S 3<sup>RD</sup> UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW, OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND WAY FORWARD**

**MARRIOTT HOTEL ON 19 APRIL, 2021**

**By Minister of Justice/Attorney General  
Rwanda.**

**Excellencies Ambassadors;**

**Resident Coordinator of ONE UN/Rwanda;**

**Distinguished representatives of UN agencies;**

**The Executive Director of the Legal Aid Forum;**

**Members of the Civil Society Coalition on UPR and other CSOs;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

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Let me first wish you all a very good morning. Those with whom we are convening physically here and many other colleagues who are with us with the aid of technology.

Permit me to extend my sincere thanks to the Members of the Civil Society Coalition on UPR for the interest you have demonstrated in the UPR process and your contribution since Rwanda signed up. I also thank the Legal Aid Forum for its role as the convener of this forum to reflect on human rights in the context of the UPR.

Before I move from this part, let me also thank you, RC, for your kind remarks and the continued support the One UN family in Rwanda has been providing in the advancement of human rights in general and the UPR in particular. Indeed, attainment of human rights should be a collaborative effort.

**Distinguished participants,  
Colleagues;**

Unlike many other occasions of similar nature, we have had before, today I was given a specific task. To talk on the topic on the “**Needed Cooperation between State and CSOs in implementing the 2021 UPR recommendations.**” I will break out a little and link my remarks to opportunities I think we have in this regard.

Before I speak about this topic, let me join colleagues who spoke before to reiterate what UPR is and outcome of the 3<sup>rd</sup> review of Rwanda under the UPR.

The objective of the UPR is to review the fulfillment of the human rights commitments and obligations of all 193 UN member states and provide an opportunity for all States to declare what actions have been taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights.

Its ultimate goal is to improve the human rights situation in every country with significant benefits for people around the globe. It is designed to prompt, support, and expand the promotion and protection of human rights on the ground.

Rwanda has undergone three reviews: in 2011, 2015, as well as the third and the most recent, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

Regarding the outcome of the review, as you may probably be aware, Rwanda received a total of 284 recommendations from 99 delegates from Member States’ delegations. Among these recommendations Rwanda supported 160, noted 75 and did not support 49.

**Distinguished Participants;**

Having reminded ourselves about what UPR is and the outcome of our last review, let me say that the first opportunity I know and enjoy is the cooperation between the State and CSOs in implementing the UPR recommendations.

Looking at cooperation from our end, we see it as the only option we have. It is not one option among many. And by cooperation we understand full and meaningful cooperation.

Working towards achievements of Human Rights ideals anywhere has never and been an individual, or unilateral effort. It is collaborative efforts among different actors at all times and many stages. The collaboration we have built is yet another opportunity.

In the context of the UPR process in Rwanda, I think you will agree with me that the fair gains we have achieved so far are owed to the existing cooperation among key stakeholders including CSOs. As I reflect on this, I want to believe that those who have been involved in the UPR process are witnesses of the positive trends since 2011. I believe that the curve is pointing upwards. As I have always noted the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle approach reversed the 2011 experience of the 1<sup>st</sup> where most of the stakeholders used to adopt an individualistic and confrontational approach. Most CSOs worked from underground and kept the government in the dark about what they were doing, simply aiming at the Geneva review. We thought this was contrary to the intent of the UPR and we sought to redirect it. For the last five years or so we have witnessed a different trend; more cooperation and less individualistic and confrontational tendencies among actors. Inclusivity, complementarily and a focus on Rwandans' lives are other opportunities we now enjoy.

I believe that in suggesting this topic for us to reflect on today, the conveners intended that we evaluate the existing cooperation. I think the question today should not be about “**whether or not**” we need cooperation. The question should probably be “**how**” we take the existing cooperation to the next level.

So, as we gather here, let us reflect back together, make a thorough evaluation on the journey we have walked in this process for the past 10 years, reflect on the challenges we met and commit to a joint and appropriate way forward as we embark in this new cycle. Engagements on all issues frankly, having no issues “too sacred” to interrogate, taking a stand, agreeing to disagree are all good indicators of a healthy dialogue and are great opportunities as well.

**Colleagues;**  
**Friends;**

As you probably have noted, the 160 recommendations that Rwanda undertook to implement for the current cycle, cover the whole range; civil and political rights;

economic, social and cultural rights, the rights of specific groups including children, women, persons with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers. Some recommendations focus on specific areas such as climate change and environment.

I noted that specific slots have been provided for different panels to reflect on these rights at some point during this reflection. It will be important to hear and engage on your perspectives on the same.

The role of CSOs in every country's life is key. This is true in the human rights field as it is in all other aspects of national life. We are aware that you have the material and human expertise for your areas of intervention and above all you have commitment to serve Rwandans. Government is fully aligned on this.

My take is that CSOs involvement and cooperation in the UPR process is vital at all stages from the review, dissemination of the recommendations, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. As I alluded to earlier, this cooperation should be full, meaningful and genuine. Over the years, we have worked on a number of challenges to make the Review smooth; but again naturally we expect challenges from the range of implementation stages.

#### **Distinguished participants;**

Before I conclude, let me state that while we are happy with the fair achievements we registered during the last cycle, we believe that together, again, we will achieve more. We accepted 160 recommendations, the number speaks to a broad range.

Particularly, regarding the role of the CSOs in the UPR, I want to reiterate the Ministry of Justice commitment to ensure that the role of CSOs in the UPR is more coordinated and has direct and positive impact on the lives of Rwandans. We wish to ensure that what is done in each area is well documented, evidence-based and that at the end of implementation period CSOs contributions in the UPR are clearly reflected in the national report. This will be achieved through frank, and smart collaboration.

At the Ministry we are finalizing the plan on how we should further engage with CSOs on the matters of human rights in general and UPR in particular. Very soon we will be seeking to engage with you to probably from where you work, or any other convenient places as we shall agree together. We want these conversations to be more focused, contextual, and with tangible plans aimed at achieving clear results.

#### **Distinguished participants;**

**Colleagues;**  
**Friends;**

In conclusion, allow me to note that cooperation is by nature, never imposed nor it is ever a one-way relationship. It calls for a common and free will of all participants. It is reciprocal and thrives only when all parties act genuinely and in good faith.

I once again thank you all and wish you fruitful deliberations.