

Honourable Judges,

The President of the Rwanda Bar Association,

Members of the Rwanda Bar Association,

Representatives of the World Intellectual Property Organization

Representatives of Government Agencies,

Distinguished Speakers and Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and myself, I welcome you all to Kigali and Rwanda and to the Sub-Regional Colloquium on Building Respect for Intellectual Property (IP) for the Judiciary.

First, please allow me to thank the World Intellectual Property Organization for their continued support and assistance in the demystification and use of Intellectual Property for the development of the whole continent and for organizing this Colloquium.

Therefore, through you, the Representative of the Africa Bureau and the Representative of the Department of the Building Respect for IP please convey our whole hearted thanks and appreciation to the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization, Dr. Francis Gurry for the continued support of WIPO.

Hosting this Sub-Regional Colloquium on Building Respect for Intellectual Property (IP) for the Judiciary is very important for the Country and especially for the Ministry which is in charge of East Africa Community Affairs. Please allow me to warmly welcome Judges from the East Africa Countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globalization and the integration of global markets have brought fundamental changes in both national development and international trade and exchanges in Africa. This is especially because of the advent of new technologies, particularly biotechnologies and informatics, which has resulted shifts in political and economic forces and altered the productive landscape worldwide.

Naturally, such changes have also led to a revolution in doing business, science, research and development with greater emphasis on the Intellectual Property environment. The big question now is :

“How do we as African countries address Intellectual Property Rights issues so that we can position ourselves as real game changers for the African Continent, especially as the African economy continues to diversify further?”

It is a well-known fact that Africa has a weak, not to say underwhelming record on creating and protecting IP. According to WIPO, *“no African nation was among the top 20 countries for patent applications in 2013.”*

This is certainly a bleak picture.

Because in this fiercely competitive international economic landscape, the creation, management and protection of knowledge will be central to building and spearheading wealth creation and integration in the global economy.

The paradox is that Africa spends on average some US \$2.2 billion in IP payments but revenues include a paltry US \$266 million. On the other hand, IP proceeds to developed countries amounted to almost US\$300 billion in 2013.

These figures are revealing enough and should help us gauge the crucial importance of IPR for Africa, in order to build sustainable knowledge economies by leveraging the benefits of science, technology and innovation.

The Global Innovation Index (GII) has noted that the Sub-Saharan Africa region is actually performing well on the innovation front. Since 2012, Sub-Saharan Africa has had more countries among the group of innovation achievers than any other region. As global economic slowdown threatens, it will be important for Africa to preserve its current innovation momentum. Similarly in 2016, there are nine African economies that rank in this year's top 100 economies in the GII: Mauritius takes the top spot among all economies in the region (53rd), followed by South Africa (54th), Kenya (80th), Rwanda (83rd), Mozambique (84th), Botswana (90th), Namibia (93rd), Malawi (98th), and Uganda (99th). What is paramount now is to help our innovators maintain and protect their intellectual property rights by adequate measures of incentives and support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Global intellectual property theft and commerce in counterfeit and pirated goods are growing at an alarming pace. Counterfeiting is no longer limited to the

knockoffs of high-end designer handbags sold on city street corners but, instead, has evolved into a sophisticated black market industry involving the manufacture and sale of counterfeit versions of an unimaginable number of products.

Reports of counterfeit pharmaceuticals, infant formula, automobile parts, batteries, and electronic products occur all too frequently and make chillingly clear the potential harm that could be inflicted on consumers, not to mention the counterfeited brand. At bottom, counterfeiters are opportunists seeking to make a profit on other people's research and innovation.

The harm that this infringement causes is hard to measure, but it is also hard to understate. Infringement of IP rights is not just an economic matter, although it does cause financial loss to legitimate business, and to the treasury. The harms caused by IP infringement go much further, to the hurts heart of communities and the wellbeing of citizens. Unsafe counterfeit goods can pose serious risks to safety. The prevalence of IP crime such as counterfeiting is closely associated with other serious criminality, and where entire markets are devoted to counterfeits, the chilling effect on legitimate traders can result in entire communities suffering from a lack of investment and the chance to thrive economically.

That's why there is urgency for public policy debate, coordination, integration and the involvement of all stakeholders in order to frame new ways to combat this great scourge. Allow me to use this platform to recognize the presence of our National Police and congratulate them for having conducted the Interpol-led operation called "FAGIA OPSON II" in December 2016 on illicit and counterfeit goods. The overall seizure of target goods worth almost USD 170,000; the seizure of which has helped

protect the Rwandan consumers from harm and send the message to counterfeiters that their actions will not be tolerated in Rwanda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The focus of this colloquium is to ensure that for all IP rights, and all types of infringing activity, there are enforcement options available, which are effective, proportionate and accessible. The focus on outreach and building respect for IP will use the best evidence available to ensure that this is a shared endeavour with government, rights holders and the public aligned in an understanding of the importance of enforcement, and joined up in their response.

Such ambitions are however nothing without a realistic plan for implementation and a commitment to delivery. Therefore, I have the pleasure to announce you that MINIEACOM with the support of WIPO started already an elaboration of the National IP Strategy which hopefully the first draft will be available by June this year.

Some of the commitments might be considered 'quick wins' and will be delivered in the near term, but others will be challenging and may take the life of the strategy to make real progress.

Following the launch of this colloquium, the immediate focus of work will be the IP Enforcement Directive. This will present a valuable opportunity to ensure that the ambitions of our strategy are properly reflected on the wider stage. In parallel with

this there is an important strand of work to be done with the Courts and enforcement agencies to improve reporting and recording of information, and work with IP rights owners to better understand the issues they face. This work will ensure policy decisions are made on the best available evidence.

Ladies and gentleman,

This Sub-Regional Colloquium is therefore timely and provides an excellent platform to the Judiciary and enforcement Agencies to face the onslaught of the new challenges that are likely to impact the dynamics of our Country and our region in general.

I wish then to call upon all of you to be fully engage in the presentations, challenge our experts, think out the box and come out with sustainable resolutions.

Ladies and gentleman,

With those few remarks, please allow me to declare the Sub-Regional Colloquium on Building Respect for Intellectual Property (IP) for the Judiciary officially opened.

I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful and constructive deliberations.

Thank you and God bless you All!

