

**EVENT: Opening of 26th African Human Rights Moot Court Competition**

**VENUE: UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS**

**DATE & TIME: MONDAY 18.09.2017 AT 15:00HRS**

I am delighted to be with you for this opening of the 26<sup>th</sup> African Human Rights Moot Court Competition. It is an honour for Mauritius to host this important event and it is with great pleasure that we welcome all of you from continental Africa – students, academics and judges. We wish you a successful competition and a pleasant stay in Mauritius.

I must thank and congratulate the Department of Law, Faculty of Law and management of the University of Mauritius and the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, for successfully joining hands to organise this competition and the honour given to me by placing this event under my patronage.

The African Human Rights Moot Court Competition is the largest annual gathering of students and lecturers of law in Africa, and one of the premier events on the African human rights calendar. The Competition prepares new generations of lawyers to argue cases of alleged human rights violations before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Defending the fundamental rights of fellow humans is a self rewarding, noble and unfortunately necessary task. I must congratulate all the young students for choosing to make of this never-ending struggle their profession and life mission.

One person who has been a victim of Human Rights violations for the major part of his life is none other than the great legendary Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected President of South Africa.

This is what he said about the Moot Court Competition, **I quote**

“One could hardly think of a better way to advance the cause of human rights than to bring together students - who are the leaders, judges and teachers of tomorrow - from different countries, with chief justices and professors, to debate some of the crucial issues of our time in the exciting and challenging atmosphere of a courtroom, where they can test their arguments and skills against one another in a spirit of fierce but friendly competition” **end quote.**

Furthermore, the unique contribution of the Moot Court in advancing human rights education in Africa was well recognised when it won the UNESCO Prize in 2006 and African Commission NGO Prize in 2012.

The Moot Court Competition ensures contact between African universities, law faculties and academics and contact between the African human rights network and global human rights networks. Indeed it helps to strengthen the largest network of African human rights lawyers.

This competition, ladies and gentlemen, provides a challenging, exciting activity for students from around the world to deepen their knowledge of human rights and learn from each other. Through their participation, the law students will understand better the constitution of their respective countries and the values therein enshrined. This is a continuous Human Rights learning programme through education and information.

I have no doubt in my mind on the value of moot courts to every law student. Participation in moot court is an exceptionally rewarding educational experience, which provides law students with the opportunity to think critically about important issues and speak confidently in front of panels of judges, but it further creates in them better understanding in the laws they theoretically study in class sessions by practically researching, writing and orally arguing on them.

The moot competition has contributed greatly to the development and refinement of the African human rights system. It is the only one of its kind that brings together the brightest young minds in the legal arena in Africa to argue real and challenging issues that trouble the continent.

We live on an extremely heterogenous continent where in some countries human rights violations come in many forms - from genocide, slavery, mass disappearances and torture, to denial of freedom of speech or freedom of the press.

For decades, the protection of basic human rights in Africa seemed to be championed mainly -- if not exclusively -- by a handful of courageous and beleaguered civil society activists. But in recent years, as democracy has spread

across the continent, the vital importance of human rights for Africa's long-term security and development has been gaining recognition. More and more African national and intergovernmental institutions are now taking up human rights issues.

It is comforting to note that there has been positive evolution in recognition of human rights in many of the African countries. However we note with dismay that many of the gains that have been made in several parts of the continent are constantly being eroded through the resurgence of conflict, terrorism, unconstitutional change of governments, gross human rights violations and the impunity that accompanies same. While considerable efforts to improve the lot of the masses have been made by many States, millions of our people continue to live undignified lives, with many languishing in extreme poverty.

Forum like the Human Rights Moot Court Competition offers a framework to collectively exchange ideas on and evaluate the situation of human rights on the continent and to review progress made in the implementation of the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

As future lawyers and defenders of human rights on the African continent, the participants will work towards ensuring that in every country people have food to eat, clean water to drink and adequate shelter. Young people must have access to education, jobs or other sources of a livelihood. We must realize the dream of a Continent where people are allowed to express their opinions freely and live in a conducive environment free of want and fear.

It is thus fitting that the moot court problem this year focuses on several topical themes, some of which are dissemination of false news through media, unemployment, corruption, copyrights and fair trial.

Ladies and gentlemen before ending I would like to thank the Hon. Mrs. Leela Devi Dookun, Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research and Hon. Etienne Sinatambou, Minister of Social Security, Reform Institutions and Environment and Sustainable Development and the Mauritius Research Council for their most significant and valuable contribution in the successful organisation of this competition. My personal gratitude to all sponsors and local academics who have so far contributed their share in the successful conduct of the competition.

Special thanks to all the participants, faculty representatives, volunteers and judges for their contribution to the 26th African Human Rights Moot Court Competition which I am convinced will be as successful as the previous editions.

Ladies and gentlemen, the finals of the Competition is scheduled for Saturday 23 September and yet I am happy to announce part of the results right now. The winners are: all the participants here present in the largest forum of law students from African Universities.

Good Luck to you all.