

**Speech by the Head of Delegation of the European Union to Rwanda during the
Opening Ceremony of 3-Day Training of journalists on human rights and judicial
reporting, Marriott Hotel Oct 12th**

- Freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and the right to information are **basic human rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. They are cornerstones of public debate and democracy. These rights are protected in both the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights alike. In Rwanda, Freedom of Expression is one of the EU's key priorities in terms of promotion and protection of human rights.
- Free expression is often painted as the bedrock of all liberties for good reason. Free speech is **central to accountable governance**. In all areas of life, liberty of debate and discussion has the potential to sort good ideas from bad ones. Consequently, a responsibility exists for the media to educate and inform citizens.
- We recognize the major efforts of the Government of Rwanda **on improving the legal framework** around freedom of expression and access to information, for instance, with regard to the recent changes in the penal code.
- Access to information is guaranteed in the Constitution, in addition by the 2013 **Access to Information law**, which has been recognised as solid and progressive legislation. We acknowledge to the efforts of RGB and the Office of the Ombudsman in their awareness raising activities (including some supported by the EU), in addition to the efforts of Rwanda Media Commission (RMC) who are also partners in this week's training. At the same time, there remains work to be done to improve awareness among the public, as well as with authorities in order to implement and enforce the legislation.
- It is key to note that access to information is a right and not a favor. This training should play a central role in ensuring journalists are aware of their rights around this, and empower them to make use of this legislation in their work. At the same time, we have to recognize the **responsibility that comes with this right**. Media practitioners have a duty to ensure that their reporting is accurate and that their conduct is ethical.

- Despite the improvement in legal framework, we note that some journalists continue to face harassment in Rwanda, and instances of self-censorship prevail. Furthermore, we regret that RMC has been unable to reach its full potential to promote freedom of expression, in part due to its lack of legal status. Such issues **hinder freedom of expression and ultimately limit accountability of duty-bearers which are key to sustainable development.**
- Now, during the **global covid-19 pandemic**, the role of journalists in ensuring that citizens of Rwanda have accurate information is more critical than ever. As well as the project in question today, the EU is also currently supporting a media project across the Great Lakes region to improve reliable journalism in the time of Covid-19. Specifically in Rwanda, we are working with partners such as Internews, Pax Press, Rwanda Community Radio Network, Media impacting communities Rwanda to counter disinformation and to ensure that communities have fact-based information on the virus and its effects.
- We are happy to see that this very pertinent training is finally able to go ahead, and we are pleased to see the strong collaboration of the judiciary in this regard. We commend the efforts of all stakeholders involved, noting the importance of the **partnership between the media and the Judiciary.** We wish you fruitful learning and deliberations.