

Statement by Barrister Akere MUNA
President of the Pan African Lawyers Union
On the occasion of the official launch of the PALU-ALSF Capacity Building Joint Project
Friday 11th February 2011

Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Rwanda
Dr. Donald Kaberuka President of the African Development Bank
Distinguished Members of the Government of the Republic of Rwanda here present
Honourable Members of the Judiciary
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
The Bâtonnier of Rwanda, Bar Leaders, Learned Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to address this august ceremony to officially launch the Capacity Building Project of the Pan African Lawyers Union in Partnership with the African Legal Support Facility of the African Development Bank.

Your Excellency President of the Republic of Rwanda, for the next seven days this amazing country of yours is going to be the African capital of the Legal Profession. Never in the history of our profession have so many Bar leaders met on African soil. My colleagues and I are grateful to you for taking time out of your very busy schedule to honour us with your presence. For the Pan African Lawyers Union this is a defining moment.

Rwanda was almost a natural choice for us to launch the series of training programmes that will take place in all the regions of Africa. For a country which just less than two decades ago, witnessed the most extreme form of the expression of human intolerance, one can only be awed by the unparalleled development that has taken place here. Mr President, faced with the choice of being the boss or the leader of your people, you have chosen the latter. Therein, I suspect, lies the secret of the success story you share with the resilient, disciplined, and great people of Rwanda. All indicators and evaluations recognize the progress made in this country, be it the doing business index of the World Bank, or the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International. Furthermore, considering the fact that Rwanda is at the cross roads of Central and Eastern Africa, Anglophone and Francophone Africa, and at the heart of the move to harmonize civil law, common law and traditional legal systems, the symbolism that Rwanda offers is one we could not ignore in planning for this ceremony.

For PALU, there is one more reason, albeit, emotional in nature. Rwanda is the home of one of the founding members of our Union, the late Bâtonnier Jean Haguma. He would have relished this moment, since he considered the training of advocates as one of the cornerstones of the mission of PALU. So today we remember and honour him in a special way. The Bar of this country has remained firmly behind PALU. I seize this

opportunity to thank the Batonnier of Rwanda for the support of his Bar and that of the lawyers of this great country.

Dr. Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank, I have said it before, and will continue to say it. You have reaffirmed the “D” in the acronym of the African Development Bank. The institution your head is forward looking and caters for the accelerators towards a developed, prosperous, integrated and sustainable Africa. The promotion of infrastructure, capacity building, higher education, a robust private sector, regional integration and good governance are the pillars of your strategy. Your Bank has doubled its capital under your leadership. Any international high-level forum at which the socio-economic fate of our continent is discussed nowadays looks incomplete without your presence or that of a representative of the institution you lead.

Thanks to you, Dr. Kaberuka, the African Development Bank is the first port of call on economic issues on Africa. The putting in place of the African Legal Support Facility is just another example of the pioneer role you play in our continent today. On behalf of the lawyers of Africa permit me to say thank you, thank you, for your support.

The Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) is the umbrella association of African lawyers, Bar Associations and Law Societies. It brings together the continent’s five regional and fifty-three national lawyers’ associations, as well as individual lawyer-members. Our mission is to work towards the development of the law and legal profession, the promotion of the rule of law, human rights and the socio-economic development of the African continent, including through supporting Africa’s regional integration. PALU is a member of General Assembly of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC-AU). In May 2006, PALU signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union Commission. By virtue of this formal MoU on co-operation, PALU advises the AU on legal issues, including on how to expand the African Court to be able to be the pre-eminent judicial forum on the continent, including on international crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, piracy, international corruption, international environmental crimes, etc

PALU and ALSF have entered into a partnership to strengthen international commercial legal practice on the African continent. The project will involve, among other things, building the capacity of both public and private sector legal counsels in complex international commercial and contractual negotiations, and also complex international commercial litigation. Predictably it will also incorporate a specific focus on assisting African governments and African lawyers to deal with the challenge of Vulture Funds on the continent.

This will be done through, among other things, five regional seminars in Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Africa, during which we will share experience,

good practices and maintain the highest standards of professionalism. The African Development Bank in another project helped us lay the foundation towards the production for a Common Code of Ethics for our Bar Associations and Law Societies. We will also build databases of leading African lawyers and relevant African, international and local laws.

Your Excellency the President of the Republic, Mr. President of the African Development Bank, Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we intend, as lawyers of this continent, to affirm our engagement to contribute to the social and economic development of our continent. Law is the bedrock of all developed and prosperous societies and so be it for Africa.

We recognise the fact that, beyond the comfort of our air-conditioned offices and expensive cars, we as sons and daughters of this continent have the obligation to be pro-actively engaged in the process of development. I am sure that the symposium this afternoon on law and development, will give us ample time to explore the paths towards such an ambitious objective.

Your Excellency the President of the Republic, with your moral support and wise guidance, Mr. President of the African Development Bank, with your partnership and assistance, we the lawyers of Africa are poised to see the invisible, touch the intangible and achieve the impossible, in the interest of one and only one beneficiary, the people of Africa.

Thank you for your attention.