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Southern African Chief Justices Forum

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WELCOME REMARKS

BY

THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

HONOURABLE MR JUSTICE L MALABA

AT

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2021
EDITION OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CHIEF
JUSTICES CONFERENCE AND ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING**

ON

24 SEPTEMBER 2021

(ELEPHANT HILLS RESORT, VICTORIA FALLS)

**THEME “THE JUDICIARY AND TECHNOLOGY IN
AFRICA”**

SALUTATIONS:

YOUR EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE, allow me to begin my remarks by extending on behalf of the Judicial Service Commission, and indeed on my own behalf, our profound gratitude to the Government of Zimbabwe for allowing us to host this Conference, despite the threat of the Covid-19 virus.

The preparations for the hosting of this event began with a request by the Chairperson, Honourable Chief Justice Nyirenda, for us to co-host it with the Judiciary of Zambia in June this year. At that time Zimbabwe, like most of the countries in the region and beyond, was just entering the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was difficult to predict whether this cycle would have passed by the time of hosting the event and whether it was even possible to stage the Conference during such an uncertain time. Eventually, after making our own assessment based on the interventions that were being implemented by the Government, we were happy to accept the request and to co-host the event, obviously with a rider that this would be subject to the situation obtaining in the country at the time of the proposed dates.

We are grateful to the Government for a timely and decisive programme of action which tamed the third wave of Covid-19, thus enabling us to host this Conference in a safe environment. This has been achieved by strategically choosing Victoria Falls town as one of the first beneficiaries of the vaccination programme, thus achieving quick herd immunity to contain the virus. However, while the environment is conducive for the Conference to take place, I wish to remind delegates that the pandemic is still upon us. We are all encouraged to continue to strictly observe the health guidelines including sanitisation, maintaining social distancing and correctly wearing our masks at all times.

Your Excellency, Honourable Chief Justices and Distinguished Delegates, the Judiciaries of Southern and Eastern Africa are gathered here once again, this being the second time following the successful Conference we held in 2015. A conference of this nature, which we endeavor to hold annually, is mutually beneficial, strengthens co-operation and builds synergies which are necessary for the proper administration of justice in our respective jurisdictions. It is my fervent hope that by the end of this programme the Conference will have

yielded the desired objectives and outcomes that the Management Committee has outlined for the gathering.

The theme for this Conference would not have been more apt than “**The Judiciary and Technology in Africa**”. The importance of technology as an enabler of efficient and effective justice administration systems cannot be over-emphasised in light of the current realities. Technology plays an important role in facilitating broad access to justice, which remains threatened by the pandemic. Forced closures of courts to minimise gatherings and lessen opportunities for transmission of the virus mean that courts cannot be reached physically by users during lockdown periods. The development and deployment of technology in the dispensation of justice has become a necessity that we can no longer afford to do without. It offers many benefits which can be harnessed by the Judiciary, including automation of court processes which ensures flexibility and expedited justice delivery. Technology also fosters transparency and has huge potential to eliminate opportunities for corruption due to minimisation of human involvement in the processes, while also enhancing easy storage and retrieval of information by stakeholders.

Your Excellency and Colleague Chief Justices, I am happy to advise that this Conference comes at a time when the Judicial Service Commission of Zimbabwe has already embarked on a journey meant to revolutionise the dispensation of and access to justice in the country by working towards the introduction of an Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS). This web-based Case Management System automates and tracks all aspects of a case life cycle, from initial filing through to disposition and brings together all justice system players under one platform. Its e-filing, e-payment and virtual court sitting components makes it an ideal technological initiative, relevant in the current “new normal” where litigants can litigate without physically getting into court. We are therefore excited as a jurisdiction to be part of this discourse that encourages the use of and reliance on ICT in the management of our courts.

Colleague Chief Justices and Delegates, the Judiciary of Zimbabwe, together with our co-host the Judiciary of Zambia, extends to you a warm welcome to the Victoria Falls. I hope that apart from the serious business of discussing Conference issues, the delegates will take time

out to enjoy the ambience offered by the Victoria Falls and its surrounding areas.

I invite you to sample and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of Victoria Falls and the humble hospitality of the Zimbabwean and Zambian people.

Welcome, Sawubona, Takulandirani, Karibu!

I THANK YOU!