

**OPENING SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY DR. SAMIA SULUHU
HASSAN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA,
DURING OPENING CEREMONY OF THE COMMONWEALTH LAW
MINISTERS' MEETING DELIVERED ON
04TH MARCH 2024 IN ZANZIBAR**

- ***Rt. Honourable Patricia Scotland**, Secretary General of the Commonwealth;*
- ***Prof. Honourable Luis Franceschi**, Assistant Secretary-General and Senior Director of the Secretariat's Governance and Peace Directorate;*
- ***Honourable Othman Masoud**, the First Vice President of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar;*
- ***Honourable Hemed Suleiman Abdulla**, the Second Vice President of Zanzibar;*
- ***Honourable Dr. Tulia Ackson (MP)**, Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania and the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union;*
- ***Honourable Zubeir Ali Maulid**, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar;*
- ***Honourable Prof. Ibrahim Hamis Juma**, Chief Justice of the United Republic of Tanzania;*
- ***Honourable Khamis Ramadhan Abdalla**, Chief Justice of Zanzibar;*

- **Honourable Amb. Dr. Pindi Hazara Chana(MP)**, Minister for Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania;
- **Honourable Haroun Ali Suleiman**, Minister for President's Office - Constitution, Legal Affairs, Public Service and Good Governance of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar;
- **Dr. Amb. Moses Mpogole Kusiluka**, Chief Secretary of the United Republic of Tanzania;
- **Engineer Zena Ahmed Said**, Secretary of the Revolutionary Council and Chief Secretary of the Revolutionary Government;
- *Honorable Ministers and Attorney Generals from Commonwealth Member Countries;*
- *Honourable Ambassadors present here;*
- *Government representatives from different Ministries, Departments and Agencies;*
- *Development Partners present here;*
- *Representatives from Non-State Actors;*
- *Distinguished guests;*
- *Ladies and gentlemen.*

First, I would like to thank the Almighty God, the Most Merciful, for giving us the grace of life and enabling us to meet in this momentous opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Zanzibar.

Allow me to congratulate Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, for her remarkable leadership and stewardship in organizing this important meeting. It gives me great pleasure to officiate the opening of the five days meeting of Law Ministers from member countries of the Commonwealth.

I have the privilege of welcoming you all to the United Republic of Tanzania, particularly in the Zanzibar Archipelago, which is also known as the Spice Island. This gathering holds a special place in our shared commitment to justice, the rule of law, and the promotion of human rights within the diverse family of Commonwealth Member Countries.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

As we convene today, we recognize Law's critical role in fostering peace, stability, and development across our member states. The legal framework we establish serves as the bedrock upon which our

societies build trust, ensure accountability, and protect the rights of every citizen. In the Commonwealth, we are bound together by our shared history and a common dedication to upholding the principles of justice, fairness, and equality. Our commitment to these ideals is reflected in the legal systems of our member states, which seek to provide access to justice for all, irrespective of background or circumstance.

This is very well reflected in the Theme of this meeting, “*Technology and Innovation: How Digitization Paves the Way for the Development of Peoples Centered Access to Justice.*” This theme provides a better platform for Law Ministers from Commonwealth Member States to discuss and deliberate for five days on how technology and innovation have potentially advanced equitable access to justice by creating more streamlined and accessible processes and ensuring the scalable, transparent, responsive, innovative, and data-driven transformation of justice systems.

The Secretary General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I have been informed that in this meeting, there will be a variety of issues placed on discussions to mention but a few Practical pathways to strengthening access to justice for disabled persons in

the Commonwealth: How Digitalization Paves the Way for the Development of People-Centered Access to Justice; Innovating for Justice: Showcasing Effective and Inclusive Approaches to Access to Justice; Mapping a people-centered Justice approach to access to justice; Facilitating collaboration and engagement across the Commonwealth: Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Elections and Artificial intelligence and the Justice System' Commonwealth Military Justice.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

In a world characterized by unprecedented challenges such as global pandemics, climate change, civil wars, socio-economic differences, and the need for gender mainstreaming, the role of law remains crucial in addressing the said challenges. The legal community is responsible for navigating these challenges and finding solutions that are just, equitable, and sustainable.

Further, as members of the Commonwealth community, we witness fast development in technology as it is reflected in many aspects and sectors of the economy, such as business, agriculture, and health, to mention a few. It is worth noting that the legal sector should not lag

behind conservatively; rather, it should utilize modern technologies to dispense justice and enhance timely access to justice for all. It is clear that most Commonwealth countries are using digital tools such as web-enabled technology, software for legal documents, virtual court sessions, e –e-filing systems, and Artificial Intelligence, contributing towards enhancing transparency and accountability in access to justice.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Digital technologies can provide innovative ways for people to seek and obtain redress through formal and informal justice systems and institutions. It is crystal clear that digitization may advance access to justice as it creates more streamlined and accessible processes.

Building capacities of Commonwealth countries remains critical for the promotion of the rule of law, including ensuring effective, inclusive, and accountable justice institutions; hence digital technology can play a critical role in promoting and strengthening skills among legal professionals across the Commonwealth jurisdiction.

Undoubtedly, with the rapid use of technology and security issues in information and data, cyber-crime incidents give us a wake-up call and necessitate further collaborations to address those challenges. In this perspective, the role of institutions and inter-governmental collaboration is crucial in addressing the challenges brought by technological advancement by having an efficient legal framework.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

The government of the United Republic of Tanzania is implementing and managing technology to provide legal services through web-based information systems. Sophisticated technologies exist that organize paperwork and files in dispute settlements to simplify and reduce the time necessary to review and analyze files. For instance, in the Judiciary of Tanzania, the court systems have embraced technologies dramatically transforming how disputes are handled. Finding examples of e-filing, video conferencing, and entire e-courts in Tanzania's jurisdictions is commonplace. All of these technologies have the effect of reducing the amount of time required to process cases, and as their use increases, we should see a concomitant decrease in the unit cost of providing legal services and highly improving access to justice.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania also launched a massive campaign in the name of *Mama Samia Legal Aid Campaign (MSLAC)*, which involves the provision of legal aid and education to the citizens at all levels on constitutional and legal issues, access to justice, and cross-cutting issues concerning the citizenry: gender-based violence, violence against women and children, land administration issues, inheritance, dispute resolution including Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and human rights in general.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Today's meeting provides us with a unique opportunity to exchange experiences, best practices, and way forward/resolution to cooperate in strengthening our legal systems. I believe this forum will open doors for further collaboration, innovation, and collective action, as we strive to meet the evolving needs of our societies.

As we deliberate on the agenda, let us be guided by the principles that unite us as Commonwealth member states. Let us seek common

ground and collective approaches that would transcend borders and foster a legal environment that promotes peace, prosperity, and the well-being of our citizens.

I am confident that the discussions over the coming days will enhance our understanding of the challenges we experience and lead to concrete actions that will strengthen the rule of law across the Commonwealth community. Together, we can build a better future where justice prevails, and the rights of every individual are protected to sustain sustainable development across the commonwealth nations.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Before concluding my speech, once again, I would like to welcome all participants and encourage them to visit the various tourist attractions located in Tanzania, Mainland, and Zanzibar. This meeting is conducted in Zanzibar Island, famously known as “vision via Marashi ya Karafuu,” which allows you to use your limited time to visit some tourist attractions and historical sites available in Zanzibar, which marks human civilization.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Please allow me to give you a synopsis of Tanzania's marine islands; the main spices produced are clove, nutmeg, cinnamon, and black pepper. The Zanzibar Archipelago and Mafia Island, located on Tanzania's Mainland, are sometimes referred to locally as the "*Spice Islands*." You are welcome to explore the beautiful Stone Town, which represents the world's historical heritage, Mnemba Island, where you can have fun with the Dolphins, and Prison Island. On weekends, after your long meeting sessions, you can spend some time on the sunny beaches and visit other tourist attractions on Tanzania's Mainland.

The Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I would like to inform you that there are plenty of tourist attractions in Tanzania's Mainland, as in Tanzania Zanzibar. I, therefore, urge you to extend your stay in Tanzania and visit tourist attractions in Serengeti National Park; Mount Kilimanjaro National Park; Ngorongoro Crater, which is the World's 8th Natural Wonder; and many other National Parks, which in total 22.

The Secretary General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Looking through your program over the next four (4) days, I am impressed that you shall be discussing a wide spectrum of issues in the Legal Sector, enhancing the application of technology in dispensing justice, as well as strengthening collaborations in improving legal systems within Commonwealth Member States. The Honourable Law Ministers have vast experience and knowledge in the Legal Sector. Therefore, I anticipate a mixed but fruitful pool of ideas that will improve our legal frameworks and systems for the betterment of our people.

Finally, The Secretary General, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is now my singular privilege and pleasure to declare the Meeting of Law Ministers from Commonwealth Member States with the theme *“How Digitization Paves the Way for the Development of People-Centered Access to Justice”* officially opened.

I thank you for your kind attention.