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Chief Justice of the Kingdom of Eswatini

Registrar of the Supreme Court

Principal Magistrates

Magistrates

UNDP Representative

Partners from the International Commission of Jurists

Members of staff

The Media

Good Morning,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today to this training. The training emanates from our engagement in June 2022 under the multi-stakeholder platform for treaty monitoring and follow-up. The platform is a culmination of a strong and necessary partnership between the Commission, National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-Up (NMRF) and the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations (CANGO). Under the platform, the Commission works with state and non-state actors to track progress on the implementation of international and regional human rights treaty recommendations. The platform has assisted the Commission to work with stakeholders in identifying priority areas to advance the realization of the country's human rights obligations.

The June session paid particular focus to the right to access justice by persons with disabilities and noted that;

- I. Persons with disabilities experience various challenges when accessing justice. These challenges are often influenced by physical, attitudinal and legal barriers.
- II. Women are disproportionately affected by the lack of appropriate and reasonable accommodations when seeking justice.
- III. Judicial officers lack the skills to ensure an accessible justice system for persons with disabilities

Today's training responds to these observations and is in line with the Commission's mandate to enhance the capacity of state actors in the protection of human rights. Hence this training will ensure that Magistrates are able to utilize a disability-rights lens when dealing with matters involving persons with disabilities. The Commission has partnered with the Judiciary to train Magistrates as they are the main players in the delivery of justice.

We may all be aware that persons with disabilities are the largest minority in the world and constitute 13.4% of Eswatini's population. The country is signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and is currently preparing its report to the CRPD Committee. The CRPD is the first international instrument dedicated to persons with disabilities and embodies the principles of; respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy and freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women and respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

In addition, the country's Constitution lists disability as a prohibited ground for discrimination and goes further to provide for the protection of the dignity of persons with disabilities. We also have the Persons with Disability Act 2018 which protects the right of persons with disabilities. These provisions set the tone for all stakeholders on how they should deal with and address matters concerning persons with disabilities.

The justice system plays a critical role in ensuring the realization of human rights by the populace in general and persons with disabilities in particular. This training will provide insights on the extent of barriers experienced by persons with disabilities when accessing courts. There will also be an opportunity to discuss measures that have been adopted by the justice system to facilitate equal access to justice for persons with disabilities. Our resource persons include regional and international experts and

judges who have advanced knowledge in the field of disability rights, I urge you to take advantage of the opportunity and draw from their wealth of experience. I am told yesterday you were exposed to practices from other jurisdictions such as Malawi and Kenya who have made great strides in this area. I hope that during the course of the training you will be able to take the lessons and apply them in our courts to enhance access to justice for persons with disabilities.

I would like to thank UNDP who has made this exercise possible. Our partners, the International Commission of Jurists, the Centre for Human Rights, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, Malawi High Court and other international disability NGOs are greatly appreciated for the technical support toward this training.

We want to thank the Chief Justice and the judiciary for this partnership and look forward to the successful implementation of the knowledge to be gained from the training.

With these few remarks I would like to welcome you all and wish you a productive learning session.

I thank you!