- The Deputy Minister of Justice of South Africa, Mr. Adries Nel
- Your Ladyship Chief Justice Georgina Wood of Ghana,
- The Chair of the Legal Practice Division of the IBA Hendrick Haag
- The Treasurer of the IBA, Michael Greene
- Presidents of bar associations and law societies
- Your Excellencies, my Lords, colleagues and friends

On behalf of the officers of the IBA African Regional Forum and the conference organizing committee, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this conference.

It is a real pleasure to see you all here and a great credit to the conference organizing committee that the arrangements for our conference have worked out so well.

I would begin by reminding us all that the African Regional Forum was founded almost 12 years ago at the International Bar Association annual conference in Vancouver, Canada. Incidentally we are returning to Vancouver in October for the IBA annual conference. The

broad vision of the IBA for founding the Forum was to identify and address the challenges faced by lawyers from Africa. The Forum was viewed as a vehicle for cooperation with bar associations and law societies and to develop interest in the IBA's activities in Africa. The Forum was also charged with a public interest mandate to educate African societies about their rights and duties in their relationship with each other and their governments.

As most of you would know the Forum has had a checkered history as a result of which a number of these aims remain unrealized. That notwithstanding, the objectives of the IBA in founding the Forum remain as relevant today as they were12 years ago.

It is my hope that we will take a few small steps in the next two days in advancing the objectives of the Forum.

We have in our midst today the presidents and officers of several bar associations and law societies and it is my hope that we will strengthen relationships were they already exist and establish new

ones were they don't. The Forum and the other constituencies of the IBA can be your partners in diverse ways.

Yesterday I attended a very successful Bar Leaders Conference presented by the IBA Bar Issues Commission and the African Regional Forum. Delegates discussed the findings of the IBA West African Project. The project assessed seven bar associations in West Africa to establish their independence and effectiveness and identify their strengths and weakness. I understand that the project is in its pilot phase and would be rolled out to the rest of the continent in the near future. Delegates also discussed an IBA and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) collaboration to build the capacity of bar associations and law societies in Southern Africa to develop and implement projects that support and advocate for the rule of law and access to justice. The vexed issue of funding for bar associations and law societies was also discussed using the Attorneys' Fidelity Fund of our hosts, South Africa, as a case study. Finally, delegates were given some insights on how the General Agreement on Trade in Services might affect cross-border legal services in Africa. The presentations were insightful and the

discussions were engaging. I would have wished that a lot more of us attended that conference.

It became quite clear to me as I listened to the presentations and discussions that there is much that as African bar associations and law societies we share in common. As lawyers, bar associations and law societies there is a lot to be gained from such interactions with our colleagues from across the continent and beyond. We will certainly enrich our experiences and become more responsive to the needs of our clients and societies.

We hope to continue on the path of sharing and enriching our experiences today and tomorrow.

As African lawyers, perhaps the most significant challenge confronting us is the state of our continent. 50 years ago in 1960 the wind of independence was blowing across the continent. In that year, 14 African countries gained independence and by 1966 all except 6 African countries were independent. The post independence record of our history has not been pretty. Almost without exception the

frontiers of the rule of law were rolled back and economic decay engulfed us. The continent has moved forward in some critical areas of governance and economic development. More African countries today have democratic forms of governance. Between 1989 and 2003, 232 elections were held in Africa – 97 presidential elections and 135 parliamentary elections. There have been many more elections since then. Today there are more Africans being educated than ever before. A number of African countries have been granted debt relief. International trade policies are now subject to greater scrutiny to assess their fairness, or lack of it. The African Union and the Regional Economic Communities appear now to be more alive to their obligation to rid the continent of impunity. Civil society organisations in a number of countries appear to have found their voice.

Of course as Wangari Maathai puts it “throughout the continent there are instances where forward motion and stasis are occurring simultaneously”.

There is so much that remains to be done on the continent.

The role of lawyers in development is well known and I will avoid the temptation of preaching to the choir today. I will only add that as Africa's lawyers our work is cut out for us.

The sessions for this conference have been carefully selected to provide forums for discussion on three thematic areas namely human rights and rule of law issues, commercial and business matters and law firm management issues. Topics range from the plenary session on the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary and legal profession, to sessions on practical, practice management topics, corporate governance, mining law, climate change, infrastructural challenges and arbitration.

An array of illustrious speakers from various African jurisdictions from South to North Africa, as well as our colleagues from Europe, are participating in the panels.

I trust that you will find much to learn and participate in. I am certain you will meet old acquaintances, network with new acquaintances

and find commonality in the challenges we share as African lawyers, which are often complex and unique when compared to other jurisdictions.

I thank the Deputy Minister for Justice for making time to join us this morning. I also thank our moderators and speakers particularly Chief Justice Georgina Wood for joining us at this conference.

We are greatly indebted to our sponsors for their support.

We are also greatly indebted to the Law Society of South Africa for their support as partners. I refer particularly to the decision to assign Barbara Whittle to support the preparations for this conference. I can say without any hesitation that but for that decision we would not have been here today.

I thank all our other partners namely the General Council of the Bar of South Africa, the Corporate Lawyers Association of South Africa and the Southern Africa Development Corporation Lawyers Association

for their invaluable support. I am also grateful to all those law firms which in diverse supported the preparations for this conference.

I would also like to thank the IBA officers and London staff who have supported us with guidance and advice. Hendrick and Michael we are delighted that you are here with us today.

The idea of holding this conference in Cape Town was first mooted during the term of my predecessor, Moses Adriko. Moses has since he left office being very supportive in the background.

I would also like to thank all the officers of the Forum and the conference organizing committee for their hard work. I am also grateful to our conference organizers, Scatterlings for a job well done.

Finally I wish to thank all of you, particularly our colleagues and friends from the Law Society of England and Wales for making time to join us here in Cape Town and making this conference possible.

I do not consider myself competent enough to describe scenic beauty and multiculturalism of Cape Town. To say that it is one of the world's most beautiful cities would be no exaggeration!

I hope you would find time to enjoy the sights and sounds of this great city.

I thank you for your attention.