

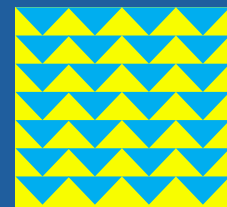


The Legal Aid Forum
Working Together For Equitable Access to Justice



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NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 1, 2024



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Community Legal Empowerment: Advancing the rights and interests of vulnerable individuals.



United against corruption: Justice sector joins hand in fighting corruption

In a united effort to combat corruption in Rwanda, The Legal Aid Forum joined Rwanda's Judiciary and Justice sector partners in the annual week-long Anti-corruption campaign conducted between February 8-16, 2024. With a theme "Ruswa ni umwanzi w'uburenganzira bwa muntu n'iterambere ry'igihugu. Twese tuyamagane", the campaign aimed to empower citizens and strengthen the country's resolve against corruption particularly in justice delivery. The campaign showcased various measures, including a dedicated technology system for whistleblowers and streamlined court services, reflecting Rwanda's commitment to fostering transparency and justice.

In a closing ceremony held in Rwamagana District on February 16, 2024, speakers emphasized the importance of community members in combating corruption, including educating the youth about the detrimental impacts of corruption and related offenses, particularly within the judicial system..



"To continue protecting our country's development goals, we must combat corruption and ensure transparency. With our effort to educate our young generation about corruption's evils, let's expose corrupt officials in the courts and prioritize honesty to elevate Rwanda's progress and benefit its people."

Dr Faustin NTEZILYAYO, Rwanda Chief Justice

Transformative Impact: Witnessing positive change in correctional facilities through DKU activity



Field Visit to witness the remarkable impact of the Dufatanye Kubaka Ubutabera activity

With the support of USAID Rwanda, the Legal Aid Forum is implementing the Dufatanye Kubaka Ubutabera (DKU) Activity, which extends legal aid and psychosocial support to inmates across 4 correctional facilities in Nyarugenge, Nyagatare, Rwamagana, and Gicumbi Districts.

Through capacity-building initiatives, the project empowers inmates by enhancing their understanding of their rights and legal procedures, enabling them to assist fellow inmates in various legal processes such as drafting court submissions, requesting hearing dates, and appealing court judgments.

To witness the remarkable impact of the project, on February 20th, 2024, the Legal Aid Forum had the privilege of accompanying partners from the US Embassy in Rwanda and USAID Rwanda to the Mageragere Correctional Facility. During the visit, inmates shared powerful testimonies highlighting how these efforts have positively transformed their lives, with some reporting significant reductions in their sentences.

The firsthand experience of witnessing the impact of the DKU Activity underscored the vital role that access to justice plays in fostering positive change within correctional facilities. The Legal Aid Forum is proud to be part of this initiative and remains committed to promoting access to justice for all, with a particular focus on vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Enhancing Judicial reporting through ethical practices and access to information

In today's world, media coverage of judicial proceedings plays a crucial role in informing the public about the intricacies of the justice system. However, with this responsibility comes the need for professionalism and ethical reporting standards. It is in this regard that the Legal Aid Forum, with support from the Foreign Common Wealth and Development Office (FCDO) and in collaboration with the Judiciary of Rwanda, convened journalists and justice actors in one workshop to delve into issues around Ethics & Access to Information for Effective Judicial Reporting.

The event presided over by the Chief Justice, Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo, provided a platform for journalists, law enforcement agencies and legal professionals to engage in meaningful dialogue, exploring legal provisions, procedures, and real case studies. Through this exchange, participants gained valuable insights into navigating the complexities of judicial reporting while upholding ethical standards.



“Recognizing the pivotal role of the media in promoting good governance, deterring corruption, and addressing injustices, I urge all journalists to prioritize investigative reporting on these critical issues. Gratitude to the Legal Aid Forum and partners for their support.”

Dr. Faustin NTEZILYAYO, Rwanda Chief Justice,



“We are grateful for the invaluable partnership with FCDO and Rwanda Judiciary, in organizing this workshop. It underscores the vital role of ethical and professional reporting in judicial proceedings. Together, we strive to empower journalists to navigate complexities, ensuring accurate and insightful coverage that upholds the highest ethical standards.”

Me Andrews KANANGA, LAF Executive Director



Tackling Misinformation and Promoting Digital Media Literacy



Brainstorming and identifying issues related to misinformation, disinformation, fake news

Despite significant advancements in Rwanda's Media Sector since the introduction of the current media policy in 2011, Rwanda continues to grapple with issues such as irresponsible use of digital media, low citizen satisfaction with accessing information, and limited access to information despite relevant laws. Moreover, arrests of media practitioners and content creators on social media platforms highlight the urgent need for intervention.

In response to these challenges, Legal Aid Forum with support from the European Union, is implementing a project titled "Creating Awareness for Responsible Freedom of Expression in Rwanda - DUSHISHOZE MU BWISANZURE BWO GUTANGA IBITEKEREZO.

Under this project on Thursday, 22nd February 2024, the Legal Aid Forum convened a workshop that brought together diverse media stakeholders including content creators, media experts, lawyers, regulators, civil society organizations, and policymakers to delve into critical issues related to misinformation, disinformation, and fake news as well as navigating the digital landscape responsibly.



"As we embark on this journey, let us not only consider the local impact but also recognize the global context of our efforts. Together, we contribute to the shared vision of a sustainable and inclusive world, where information is not just a commodity but a cornerstone for building resilient and empowered societies."

Me Andrews Kananga, Executive Director of Legal Aid Forum



"We are pleased to collaborate with the Legal Aid Forum in Rwanda to promote responsible freedom of expression and enhance digital media literacy in Rwanda. The European Union is committed to supporting Rwanda in addressing the challenges faced in the media sector. By empowering citizens with the necessary skills and knowledge, we contribute to building a more inclusive and informed society."

Dr. Uwe WISSENBACH, Deputy Ambassador EU in Rwanda

Promoting Human rights in Rwanda: Empowering Civil Society and community engagement



Workshop on Human Rights in the Frameworks of International Conventions and Mechanisms

In effort to advance human rights in Rwanda, the Legal Aid Forum has initiated a project with support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with the aim of "Entrenching the Culture of Human Rights in Rwanda through Mainstreaming Recommendations from International Human Rights Mechanisms". The Legal Aid Forum on March, 6th 2024 hosted a one-day workshop gathering stakeholders from various human rights organizations to collaboratively develop tailored Awareness Raising Materials for different vulnerable groups including women, children, persons with disabilities, elderly people, and LGBTQI+. These materials are envisioned to be user-friendly, informative, and sensitive to the unique challenges faced by these groups.

In line with the project, LAF will work to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage in important human rights mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and treaty body reporting, so as to empower them in advocating for and protecting human rights. This initiative represents a significant step forward in LAF's commitment to promoting human rights in Rwanda, demonstrating the importance of collaboration and community engagement in advancing this critical cause.



“Working collaboratively with stakeholders is crucial in our mission to embed human rights across Rwanda. By engaging CSOs and empowering them with knowledge and resources, we aim to foster a culture of human rights that is inclusive, accessible, and respected by all sectors of society.”

Me Mary MUSONI, Senior Legal Empowerment Officer at LAF

Collaborative efforts for media development in Rwanda



Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Rwanda's media sector

To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Rwanda's media sector, the Legal Aid Forum joined partners in a Media Sector Technical Working Group to discuss how to improve the efficiency & effectiveness of various stakeholders intervening in Rwanda's media sector.

Co-chaired by the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), the Embassy of Sweden, and ARFEM Rwanda, the meeting discussed strategies for improvement across various thematic areas, including Capacity Building and Viability, Legal and Regulatory Framework, Gender and Inclusion, as well as Media Literacy and Social Media. Participants engaged in constructive dialogue, sharing insights and perspectives to advance media development initiatives in Rwanda.



"The collaboration among stakeholders in addressing key challenges within the media sector is crucial for fostering sustainable development. By supporting initiatives like this meeting, we contribute to creating a more vibrant and inclusive media environment that upholds the values of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity."

Me Andrews Kananga, Executive Director of Legal Aid Forum



Rwanda takes strides toward media regulation



VALIDATION SESSION FOR CODE OF MEDIA SERVICES NAD GOVERNANCE

In a proactive move towards enhancing media regulation and professionalism, the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), in collaboration with the Legal Aid Forum and other relevant stakeholders, spearheaded an initiative to update the Comprehensive Code of Media Services and Governance in Rwanda.

On 16th March 2024, the code was validated by stakeholders including the board of RMC as well as media practitioner and journalists. The session served as a platform for media practitioners and stakeholders to review and provide feedback on the code, ensuring its alignment with international standards and best practices.

With media ethics and accountability at the forefront, participants engaged in constructive dialogue and deliberation, reflecting the collaborative efforts toward enhancing transparency and integrity within the media sector. The event marked a significant milestone in Rwanda's media landscape, signaling a collective commitment to upholding ethical standards and promoting a vibrant and credible media environment for the nation.



Promoting Responsible Freedom of Expression: a beacon of access to information and self-regulation



Regional awareness sessions on media self-regulation, access to information, digital media literacy, and responsible freedom of expression in Rwanda

In the ongoing implementation of projects entitled "Creating Awareness for Responsible Freedom of Expression in Rwanda - DUSHISHOZE MU BWISANZURE BWO GUTANGA IBITEKEREZO" supported by EU and "Promoting International Standards on Freedom of Expression in Rwanda through Media Policy Reforms, Media Ethics, and Self-Regulation," supported by FCDO, the Legal Aid Forum successfully conducted awareness workshops in the Western and Southern provinces of Rwanda.

Aiming to enhance access to information, promote digital media literacy, and advocate for media self-regulation, the workshops were attended by more than 300 participants including Mayors of the Districts, Executive Secretaries of sectors, and Journalists from each Province. The events were presided over by the Governors of the Provinces and featured presentations by the Rwanda Governance Board, Rwanda Media Commission, and ARFEM, on various topics.



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The workshops emphasized the importance of media self-regulation in nurturing democratic practices within the media sector and promoting digital media literacy. Stakeholders gained a clearer understanding of media regulation and self-regulation, as well as increased knowledge on critical thinking in digital media consumption.

The collaborative efforts between the media fraternity, local government, civil society, and law enforcement agencies have been strengthened, reflecting a commitment to enhancing access to information and media literacy in Rwanda.

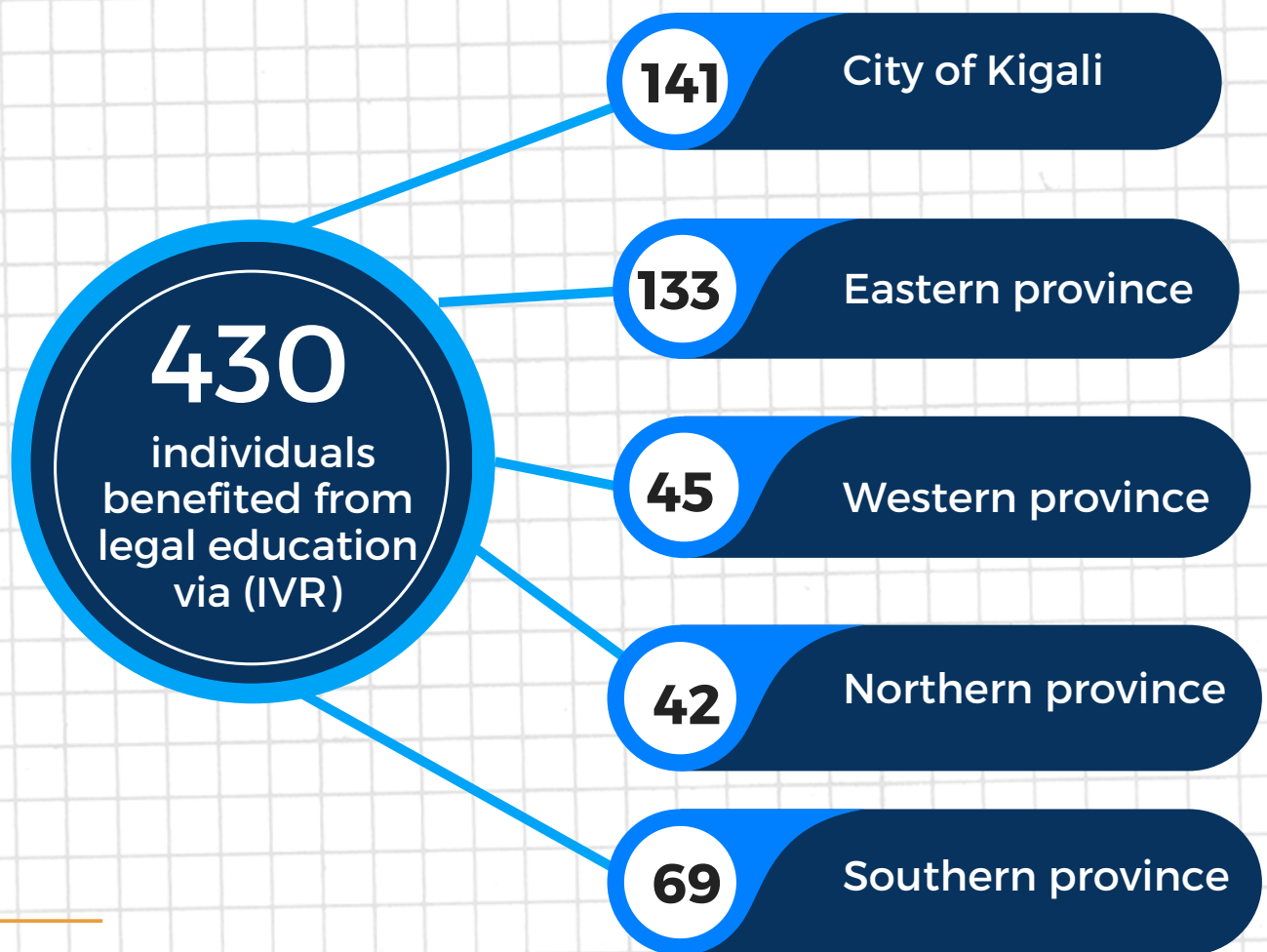




Legal Aid Forum's Impact: Empowering Individuals through legal assistance

Our legal empowerment approaches include a range of approaches, such as community-based paralegals, Legal Aid Week, simple mobile phone technology, Mobile Legal Aid Clinics, Media, University Legal Aid Clinics, Posters, and more. By implementing these approaches, we aim to empower the Rwandan community to advance their rights and interests.

THIS GRAPHICS SUMMARIZE LEGAL EDUCATION (IVR) BY NUMBERS



1022



→ 182 people received legal advice through the call center



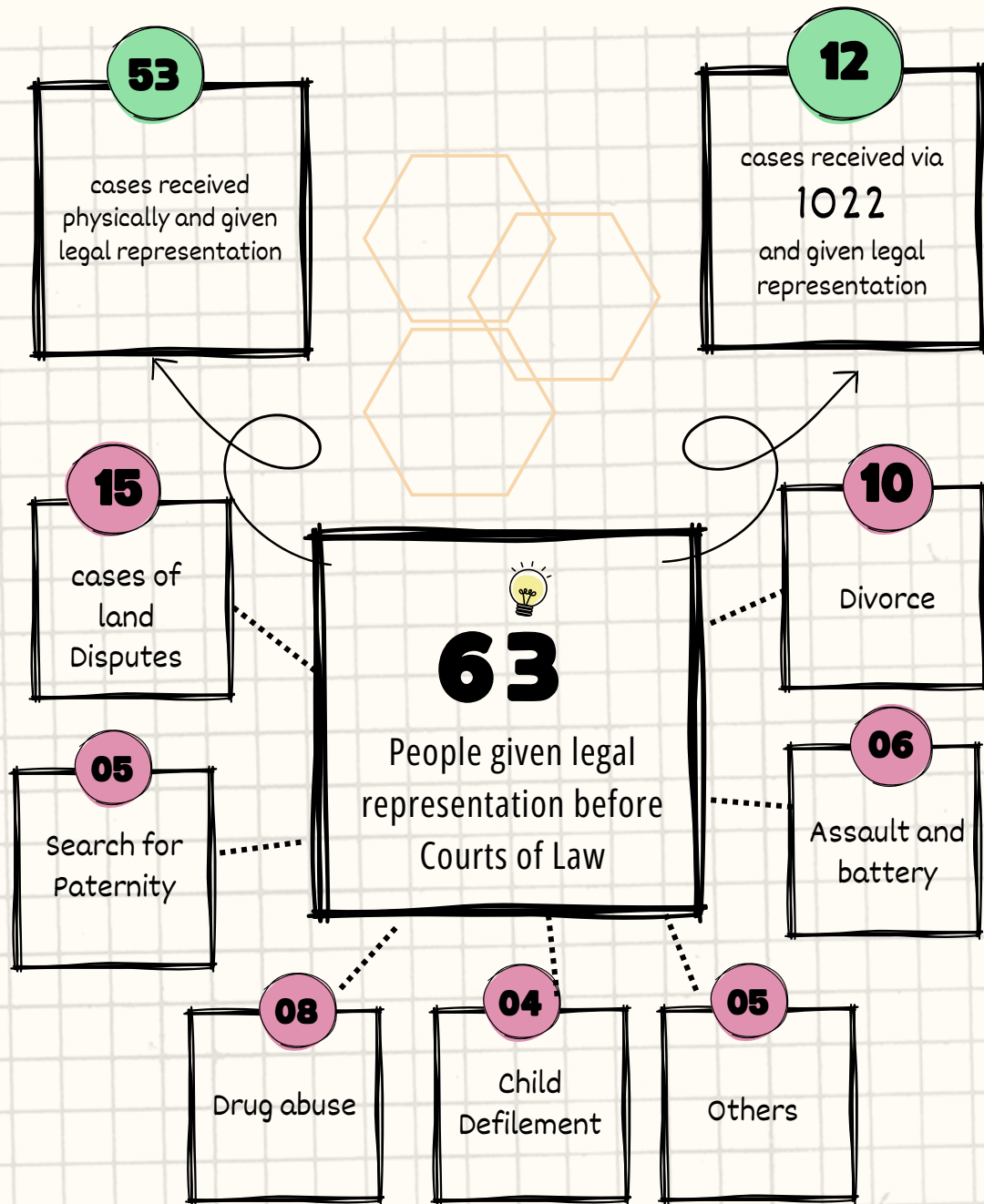
→ 1150 people received legal advice from paralegal



Legal Aid Forum's Impact: Empowering Individuals through legal assistance

In the first quarter, we offered legal representation to 32 women and 31 men from all provinces of Rwanda, with the majority coming from Kigali City.

This graphics summarize legal representation by numbers



Impact beyond numbers: the story of Francine and Carine

In the first quarter of 2024, the Legal Aid Forum continued its services of providing legal representation to vulnerable individuals facing various legal challenges across Rwanda. From cases of land disputes to issues of divorce, search for paternity, assault and battery, child defilement, and drug abuse, the Legal Aid Forum has been a beacon of hope for not only resolving legal disputes but also restoring hope and dignity to those in need.

One of the cases is the story of two young ladies Francine and Carine. In 2015, Clever transported victim Francine from Rwanda to Uganda in a place called Bussia, bordering Uganda and Kenya, after lying to her that he was offering her an excellent job in his supermarket and promised to pay her a monthly salary of 40,000 Frws. When she reached Uganda, she was told to work as a housemaid at Claver's home without being paid.

After 5 months, Clever asked Francine if she had friends who were young girls and looking for jobs to connect them to him so that he could also bring them to Uganda and employ them. Francine mentioned that she had a best friend she left back in Rwanda called Carine. Carine was also transported to Uganda by Clever after falsely promising her a good life and a better-paying job as their friend. Both Francine and Carine were taken to Claver's bar where he started to serve them to old men for sex as they paid him. For a long time, they were sold to very old men for sex and injected drugs into their bodies.

In this case, TWAGIRUMUKIZA Clever was found guilty of the crimes of human trafficking, and he was punished by 8 years of imprisonment and a fine of 2,000,000 Frws. LAF received a request from MIGEPROF for legal assistance on behalf of Carine and Francine to which LAF assigned a lawyer to their case.

With the assistance of the Legal Aid Forum Lawyer assigned to their case, Francine and Carine filed a case at the Intermediate Court of Nyarugenge, seeking that the court order TWAGIRUMUKIZA Clever to compensate them for the crime committed against them. On January 18, 2024, the court ruled in their favor and ordered TWAGIRUMUKIZA Clever to pay Francine and Carine an amount of ten million (10,000,000 Frw) each



“The legal representation provided by LAF was a turning point in our lives. It brought closure to a dark chapter and paved the way for our healing and recovery.”

Francine and Carine, beneficiaries of LAF's representation

CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MONTH



Roundtable discussion with Female Media practitioners

In celebration of International Women's Month and Rwanda's remarkable 30 years of transformation, the Legal Aid Forum partnered with the Association of Female Journalists in Rwanda (ARFEM) to host a 2-day roundtable discussion tailored for female journalists.

Held on 14th – 15th March, with a focus on empowerment and skills-building, the roundtable discussion convened 40 female journalists to delve into various facets of their profession.

Through dynamic sessions covering legal frameworks, judicial reporting, science journalism, and photojournalism, participants not only gained valuable insights but also refined their skills to foster a more informed, ethical, and diverse media landscape in Rwanda.

This initiative underscores Rwanda's steadfast commitment to gender equality and inclusivity, as well as the Legal Aid Forum and ARFEM's joint dedication to elevating women in the media industry through collaboration, expertise, and resources.





Legal Aid Forum office celebrated Women's Day in style

Celebrating the spirit and strength of women, the Legal Aid Forum reaffirms its commitment to advocating for gender equality and women's rights on International Women's Day 2024.

On this day the office joined women colleagues to celebrate their invaluable contributions to society and their unwavering determination to uphold justice and equality for all.



Strengthening partnerships to foster effective relationships

Executive Director received the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) of the British Parliament



Executive Director held a discussion with delegate of the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights

The Legal Aid Forum Executive Director Andrews Kananga received a delegation of the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) of the British Parliament. The discussions revolved around the work of Legal Aid Rwanda, especially on legal assistance and protection for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.



The Legal Aid Forum facilitated a delegation from the Black Law Students Association of the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School on their 2024 Pan-African Visit to Rwanda

The Legal Aid Forum was delighted to receive a delegation from the Black Law Students Association of the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School on their 2024 Pan-African study visit to Rwanda aimed at Human and Civil rights frameworks, with a focus on Constitutional and Legislative changes initiated by the Rwandan Government to confront discrimination and divisive Genocide ideology. Some of the institutions they visited include:



Executive Director met BLSA students who were on tour in Rwanda



The BLSA delegation visited Rwanda Judiciary and Interpeace

The Black Law Students Association from the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School visited Rwanda Judiciary and International Organization for Peacebuilding, exploring the digitization of Rwanda's Court System and the crucial role of reconciliation in uniting the Rwandan society post-1994 genocide against the Tutsi



BLSA students at Interpeace



BLSA students at Rwanda Judiciary

The Black Law Students Association at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School visited the University of Rwanda

The Black Law Students Association at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School visited the University of Rwanda, where they made a presentation to fellow Law Students on Comparative Analysis of Human and Civil Rights in light of the 60th anniversary of the USA's 1964 Civil Rights Act. The delegation had time to tour the Centre for Legal Aid and Mediation, observing how law students provide legal aid services to beneficiaries in legal aid clinics.



The Black Law Students Association at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School visited the University of Rwanda



BLSA students had time to exchange with fellow law student at University of Rwanda



BLSA students had time to exchange with fellow law student at University of Rwanda

The BLSA delegation visited Avega Agahozo Office

The Black Law Students Association from the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School had time to visit the Avega Agahozo at its headquarters to learn about Women's leadership in reconstructing communities After Conflict (1994 genocide against Tutsis): in this topic, they discussed how women-led initiatives fostered reconciliation, promoted dialogues, to build bridges between different groups with post-conflict societies.



BLSA students visited Avega Agahozo



BLSA students BLSA students visited Avega Agahozo



Call our Toll Free Legal aid Helpline (1022) to get assistance from a lawyer or listen to legal aid information for free.

Legal Aid Forum

**Working together
for
equitable access to
justice**

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