

## **Report from the Department of Citizens Rights**

The Citizens' Rights Department was established as a component of the Access to Justice for All programme by the FMOJ as an avenue for the Citizenry to seek redress for rights violations. The mission statement of the Department is "to foster true democracy through the protection of the rights of the citizens, by giving them access to justice".

The Department in furtherance of its mandates receives, examines and reviews petitions on a myriad of issues ranging from Human Rights Abuses, wrongful termination/dismissal, non-fulfillment of contractual obligations, enforcement of Court judgments, domestic violence, inheritance issues, matrimonial causes matters/child custody, compulsory/forceful acquisition of properties without compensation, trespass to land, denial of right of egress/ingress to property.

The Department has gradually evolved into the heartbeat of the Citizenry and residents as the humanitarian face of the Office of the Honourable Attorney-General of the Federation. The Department adopts the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques in the resolution of the disputes that are presented by the various petitions. Also, subsumed under the Department is the National Committee Against Torture with the mandate to receive and examine complaints of torture from individuals and civil society organization (CSO).

### **Overview of activities**

Between January 2015 and June 2017, the department received a total of 366 petitions on variety of issues. The Department has successfully resolved a good number of the disputes thrown up by the petitions during the period under review

### **Challenges**

Limited training opportunities for staff of the Department, specifically in the area of enforcement of human rights and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Most of the lawyers in the department are not well-versed in ADR as a means of settling human rights complaints.

The department is unable to enforce decisions and parties' response to petitions. Most of the petitions that are pending are because respondents and petitioners including some government agencies ignore correspondence from the department.

The Department has had difficulties conducting physical investigation of any of the petitions received during the period under review due to paucity of funds. The Department handles petitions through writing of the correspondences and physical investigations/verification of allegations.



Lack of publicity of the activities of the department. The activities of the Department are yet to be known to a larger part of the society because the department activities are not advertised or publicized in any other manner through the media.

Lack of synergy with other government agencies with similar mandates. At the moment there does not exist enough synergy between other agencies of Government such as the Public Complaints Commission, the National Human Rights Commission which have similar mandates with the Citizens' Rights Department.