

Rwanda renews appeal to UN for return of ICTR archives to Kigali

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Rwanda has renewed its appeal to the United Nations Security Council, calling for the archives of the now defunct International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to be relocated to Kigali. It argues that the records of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda should be preserved in the country where that history unfolded.

Justice Minister Emmanuel Ugirashebuja made the case during the UN Security Council Open Debate on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in New York, on June 12, stressing that the issue goes beyond logistics and touches on justice, memory, and historical ownership.

“Madam President, the question before this Council is one of principle: where should the historical record of the Genocide against the Tutsi be preserved so that it remains most meaningful, accessible, and rel-

evant to those whose history it documents?” he said.

Ugirashebuja commended the leadership of the Residual Mechanism, including President Graciela Gatti Santana and Prosecutor Serge Brammertz, for presenting the Sixth Review Report, noting the progress made in completing the tribunal’s mandate.

He said Rwanda values the legacy of international justice institutions and has worked closely with both the ICTR and its successor mechanism over the past three decades. That partnership, he said, has evolved alongside Rwanda’s own institutional development.

“Today, Rwanda is not merely a beneficiary of international justice efforts. It is a partner in preserving their legacy and ensuring their continued relevance,” the minister said.

Ugirashebuja further reiterated that the ICTR archives, unlike those

of other international tribunals, are uniquely tied to one country and one historical tragedy.

“These archives concern one country, one people, and one genocide. They are inseparable from Rwanda’s history,” he said. “Logic, principle, and historical reality therefore point in the same direction: these archives should be located where their significance is greatest.”

He acknowledged that the archives remain legally owned by the United Nations but argued that ownership should not be the sole factor guiding their future location. Instead, he said, historical relevance, accessibility, and proximity to affected communities must also guide the decision.

Rwanda, he said, has already met all requirements necessary to host the archives, including infrastructure for preservation, digitization capacity, legal safeguards, and trained personnel. The country is also ready to fully finance the transfer and long-term management of the archives.

“Rwanda is prepared to assume the costs associated with the transfer, preservation, and digitization of the archives,” he said, adding that this would eliminate the need for additional financial contributions from UN member states.

He stressed that relocating the archives would not only preserve history but also restore emotional and

symbolic meaning for survivors of the genocide.

“For the survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi, the transfer of the ICTR archives would not simply represent the relocation of records. It would represent the return of an essential part of their history,” he said.

Beyond the question of archives, the minister also addressed Rwanda’s broader role in the remaining work of the ICTR and its successor mechanism. He highlighted the continued importance of international cooperation in tracking genocide fugitives, noting that more than 1,000 remain at large globally.

He underscored the country’s readiness to host a small residual office to support cooperation with national jurisdictions, strengthen fugitive tracking, and ensure continuity in accountability efforts, and also indicated willingness to cover associated operational costs.

Ugirashebuja reiterated Rwanda’s offer to receive individuals convicted by the ICTR for sentence enforcement, as well as Rwandans who were acquitted or have completed their sentences but remain without durable solutions.

He said Rwanda’s correctional system meets international standards, providing adequate health-care, rehabilitation programmes, and independent monitoring. Over the past decades, he added, Rwanda has

gained extensive experience in receiving and reintegrating former genocide convicts, contributing to reconciliation and social cohesion.

“We therefore encourage the Council to give favourable consideration to Rwanda’s longstanding offer, which aligns with the Completion Strategy and the principle of national ownership,” he said.

The minister concluded by emphasising that the Residual Mechanism was never intended to be permanent, and that the time had come for the Security Council to take decisive steps on its remaining responsibilities, including the future of the ICTR archives.

He said the decision should be guided not only by administrative considerations but also by justice, memory, and the voices of survivors whose history is preserved in those records.

More than 30 years after the Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda has the capacity, the experience, and the commitment to preserve this legacy, he said.

Rwanda, he added, will continue engaging constructively with the Security Council, the Mechanism, and the UN Secretariat on a sustainable path forward for the tribunal’s remaining functions.