

Opinions

Why Louise Mushikiwabo deserves a third term as OIF Secretary-General

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Louise Mushikiwabo

As the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) prepares for its 2026 summit in Phnom Penh, the spotlight is firmly on incumbent Secretary-General Louise Mushikiwabo.

Nominated by Rwanda for a historic third mandate, Mushikiwabo's candidacy is gaining momentum, framed by supporters as a necessary move to consolidate a decade of deep institutional reform and economic pivoting.

The OIF stands at a critical juncture in its history. Representing over 300 million speakers across five continents, the organisation is no longer just a club for celebrating the French language; it has evolved into a vital geopolitical, economic, and cultural bloc. At the heart of this modern transformation is Mushikiwabo.

Since taking the reins as Secretary-General in 2019, the veteran Rwandan diplomat has systematically dismantled outdated perceptions of the OIF, replacing them with a streamlined, high-impact model of multilateralism.

When Mushikiwabo first assumed office, she inherited an organisation burdened by bureaucratic inertia and a scattered mandate. She immediately launched a comprehensive structural overhaul designed to restore the OIF's credibility and efficiency.

By restructuring internal governance, optimising budget allocations, and eliminating redundant programmes, she shifted the OIF's focus toward high-priority initiatives

and measurable outcomes. Under her leadership, administrative overhead was reduced, ensuring that financial resources directly benefit field projects in member states.

A renewed mandate will allow her to anchor these financial and structural reforms permanently, ensuring the OIF remains a lean, agile institution capable of navigating a rapidly changing global landscape.

Mushikiwabo has fundamentally redefined the OIF's mission by recognising that cultural affinity must be paired with economic opportunity. She pioneered the concept of "Economic Francophonie," transforming the linguistic bloc into a network for trade, entrepreneurship, and digital innovation.

Understanding the demographic realities of the French-speaking world, where the vast majority of speakers are young people living in Africa, she launched massive economic missions. These initiatives have connected hundreds of Francophone businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), across Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia.

Furthermore, her focus on digital literacy and coding programmes for women and youth, which aims to equip the next generation with the tools needed for the modern workforce, has already benefited many. Reflecting her ensures that this vital economic momentum will not be lost.

In an era defined by geopolitical fragmentation and the retreat of traditional multilateralism, Mushikiwabo has successfully positioned the OIF as a respected diplomatic mediator. Leveraging her extensive background as Rwanda's long-serving minister of foreign

affairs, she has brought a sharp, pragmatic diplomatic edge to the organisation.

Under her watch, the OIF has actively engaged in crisis resolution, democratic transition monitoring, and peacebuilding efforts in volatile regions. She has broken the old paradigm of North-South lecturing, fostering a diplomacy rooted in mutual respect and horizontal solidarity.

By strengthening partnerships with the United Nations, the African Union, and the European Union, Mushikiwabo has given the Francophone world a unified, powerful voice on global issues such as climate change, security, and global health equity.

For decades, the promotion of the French language was treated by critics as a nostalgic exercise. Mushikiwabo flipped this script by modernising how French is positioned globally. She has championed French not as a language of the past but as a language of the future specifically as a tool for business, international diplomacy, science, and digital technology.

As the OIF gathers in Cambodia for its 2026 summit, the organisation faces a choice between the uncertainty of transition and the certainty of proven progress.

At this critical juncture, granting Mushikiwabo a historic third mandate would be more than a vote of confidence in her visionary leadership; it is a strategic necessity to secure the OIF's long-term stability, influence, and future prosperity.

The writer is a political and diplomatic analyst specialising on Africa and countries of the Great Lakes Region.