



REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

Opening Statement of the Government of Rwanda at the Review of its 5th Periodic Report Before the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Delivered by Dr. UGIRASHEBUJA Emmanuel, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General

February 17, 2025, Geneva

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon.

1. It is an honour to appear before this Committee to present Rwanda's 5th periodic report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). On behalf of the Government of Rwanda, my delegation and I express our gratitude for this opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue on the progress made in implementing the Covenant, as well as the challenges that remain.
2. My name is Emmanuel UGIRASHEBUJA, and I serve as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Rwanda. I am joined by:
 - H.E. James NGANGO, Rwanda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva;
 - Dr. Nelson MBARUSHIMANA, the Director General of Rwanda Basic Education;

- Mr. Michel NDAKIZE RUGAMBWA, Acting Deputy Director General of the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda; and
 - Mr. William NDENGEYINKA, Senior State Attorney in the Department of International Justice and Judicial Cooperation at the Ministry of Justice;
3. Rwanda's 5th periodic report, which we are presenting today, was submitted in December 2020, followed by the replies to the list of issues in December 2024. The preparation of the report followed a participatory approach, with extensive consultations involving stakeholders. It was coordinated by the Ministry of Justice through the National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting, and Follow-up (NMIRF), which is responsible for preparing reports on the implementation of human rights conventions, including the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The NMIRF, headed by the Ministry of Justice, comprises representatives from government bodies, National Commission for Human Rights and civil society as well as Private sector.
 4. The preparation for the review mirrored the consultative nature of the implementation and reporting phases. In this regard, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, through their regional office in Yaoundé and the Senior Human Rights Officer in Kigali, for their specific support during the preparation of this review.
 5. Since our last review over a decade ago, Rwanda has undergone significant changes in its policy, legal, and institutional landscape. During this period, Rwanda held a constitutional referendum in 2015 and adopted constitutional amendments in 2023. The 2015 referendum adjusted presidential term limits to ensure stability and continuity in leadership through a transitional arrangement. The term for both the Presidency and Parliament, the Senate Chamber, was reduced from seven years to five years.
 6. In 2023, Rwanda further refined its governance framework by aligning the schedules of presidential and parliamentary elections, enhancing efficiency and reducing electoral costs. These changes reflect Rwanda's commitment to a governance model shaped by national priorities and broad citizen engagement.

7. While electoral processes fall within the realm of civil and political rights, this new governance framework is instrumental in creating conditions for the effective implementation of economic, social, and cultural rights.
8. At the institutional level, Rwanda established the Rwanda Forensic Laboratory (RFL) in 2016, upgrading it to the Rwanda Forensic Institute (RFI) in 2023. RFI has enhanced forensic and advisory services, strengthening accountability in sectors critical to economic, social, and cultural rights. Its digital forensic and document services help combat financial crimes like fraud and embezzlement, which undermine public resources and economic stability. This, in turn, supports the realization of ESCR, such as the right to an adequate standard of living and social security (Articles 11 and 9 of the ICESCR). By securing public and private assets, RFI also contributes to access to justice, particularly for vulnerable populations.
9. In 2017, the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) was established to enhance specialization and professionalism in crime investigation. With dedicated divisions for economic and financial crimes, RIB protects economic rights by addressing issues such as embezzlement, and corruption. These efforts help safeguard public funds for essential services like healthcare and education, supporting rights such as the right to health and education (Articles 12 and 13 of the ICESCR). By promoting accountability and transparency, RIB strengthens the governance framework necessary for the effective realization of ESCR.
10. In the judiciary, Rwanda made significant strides in strengthening its justice system. In 2018, the Court of Appeal was established, further enhancing the country's capacity to provide effective legal recourse. More recently, in 2024, the establishment of an Appeal Tribunal to hear matters relating to refugee and asylum claims reinforced Rwanda's commitment to upholding the rights of individuals in vulnerable situations, aligning with the principles of the ICESCR.

Madam Chair,

11. Rwanda's legal framework strongly supports the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR), as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda. Key constitutional provisions include: protection from discrimination (Article 16); the right to education (Article 20); the right to health (Article 21); the right to a clean

environment (Article 22); the right to free choice of employment (Article 30); the right to form trade unions and employers' associations (Article 31); the right to collective bargaining (Article 32); the right to strike (Article 33); the right to private property (Article 34); the right to private ownership of land (Article 35); and the right to activities promoting national culture (Article 36).

12. Further, since the last report, Rwanda has enacted several laws that align with the provisions of the Covenant and contribute to the progressive realization of economic, social, and cultural rights. These laws address critical areas such as non-discrimination, land rights, labor rights, public service, expropriation, environmental protection, and the management of air quality and water resources. For example, the Labor Law ensures fair wages and working conditions, while the Land Law provides secure land tenure, which is essential for economic stability. The Education Law guarantees access to quality education at all levels, promoting the right to education as enshrined in the Covenant. Additionally, the Health Insurance Law enables broader access to healthcare services, advancing the right to health.
13. Rwanda has also adopted laws on child protection, refugee rights, and cultural heritage, each supporting the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. These laws collectively foster a governance framework that is not only aligned with the Covenant but also focused on the progressive realization of these rights for all Rwandans.

Madam Chair,

14. During the period under consideration, Rwanda successfully completed its ambitious 2020 Vision and adopted the Vision 2050. Highlighting the link between these two long-term strategic frameworks, H.E. President Kagame stated: *'We do not want to be a status quo people. Vision 2020 was about what we had to do in order to survive and regain our dignity. But Vision 2050 has to be about the future we choose, because we can, and because we deserve it.'*
15. Rwanda's Vision 2020 strategy led to significant socio-economic progress, with poverty declining from 60.4% to 38.2% and GDP per capita rising from \$268 to \$1,040. Health outcomes improved markedly, as under-five mortality dropped from 196 to 45 per 1,000 live births, and life expectancy increased to 69.6 years by 2022, from 51.2 in

2002. Additionally, literacy rates saw a substantial rise, from 35% in 2005 to 78.8% in 2022, reflecting Rwanda's investment in human capital development.

16. From 2018 to 2024, Rwanda implemented its first National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), which laid the foundation for sustainable development. It was succeeded by NST2, which runs until 2029, aiming to build on previous gains and further accelerate economic, social, and governance transformation.
17. Building on these long-term strategic visions, the implementation of NST1 (2018–2024) yielded significant progress across various sectors. Rwanda maintained steady economic growth, with GDP expanding at an average of 7% and per capita income rising from \$729 to \$1,040 in 2023/2024. Infrastructure development advanced with the construction of over 1,600 km of national roads and 4,137 km of feeder roads. Job creation efforts led to over 1.3 million decent and productive jobs, while financial inclusion improved from 89% in 2017 to 96% by 2024. Life expectancy also increased from 66.6 to 69.9 years. Tourism revenues nearly doubled, increasing from \$374 million in 2017 to \$620 million in 2024.
18. Access to electricity surged from 34.4% to 78.9%, significantly improving household livelihoods and business productivity. The country also made notable advancements in public service delivery, particularly through digital transformation. The number of government services available online expanded from 155 to over 680, enhancing efficiency and accessibility while laying the foundation for a digitally driven economy.
19. The digitized services cover various sectors, including agriculture and livestock (e.g., purchasing vaccines, bovine semen), trade and industry (e.g., product registration, VAT exemption), infrastructure and environment (e.g., requests for laboratory and field tests, meteorological services), education (e.g., ECD accreditation certificates, foreign equivalency certification for TVET), and health (e.g., community-based health insurance, laboratory tests, health facility licensing), land (e.g. land registration, change of land use, title transfer, authentication for loan agreement) among others.

Madam Chair,

20. Rwanda has significantly strengthened its healthcare system under NST1. Seven new hospitals were added to the existing 52, while 23 were rehabilitated or expanded.

Health centers increased to 518, with 12 newly built and 12 rebuilt. Health posts grew from 473 in 2017 to 1,280 in 2024, ensuring most Rwandans can access a facility within 25 minutes. Eleven health centers were upgraded to medicalized centers managed by doctors.

21. The community health program transitioned to a polyvalent model, with 58,567 CHWs across 14,837 villages providing comprehensive services, including maternal and child health, family planning, HIV management, NCDs, mental health care, and emergency response. CHW efforts have reduced malaria incidence by 90% since 2017.
22. Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) coverage has reached 93% of the population. Maternal and neonatal care improvements include ultrasound deployment in all 518 health centers, high-risk pregnancy tracking, and Rwanda becoming the first country to adopt eight antenatal care contacts. Maternal mortality dropped from 203 per 100,000 live births in 2019/2020 to 105 in 2024. Facility-based deliveries rose to 93%, with 94% of births attended by skilled personnel.
23. Child health and nutrition improved, with stunting among children under five decreasing from 38% in 2014/2015 to 33% in 2019/2020, and wasting from 2% to 1%. Under-five mortality declined from 50 to 45 deaths per 1,000 live births between 2015 and 2020. A multi-sectoral plan introduced malnutrition screening, food supplementation, and micronutrient provision for pregnant women.
24. Life expectancy has reached 70 years, increasing NCD prevalence. Rwanda has introduced specialized services, including comprehensive cancer care, kidney transplants, interventional cardiology, assisted reproductive technology, and interventional radiology. CBHI covers these services, reducing expensive medical referrals abroad.
25. Emergency response has improved, with the ambulance fleet doubling to 533, reducing the ambulance-to-population ratio from 1 per 56,000 to 1 per 25,000. Response times are now 10 minutes in Kigali and 30-45 minutes elsewhere.
26. The health workforce includes 29,396 professionals: 2,647 doctors, 15,765 nurses, 2,139 midwives, and 7,162 allied health professionals. To meet WHO's recommended ratio of four healthcare providers per 1,000 people, Rwanda plans to quadruple health

professionals in four years. Medical school admissions have increased 3.7 times, with 13,465 students currently in training.

27. Healthcare modernization includes advanced imaging, laboratory equipment, local pharmaceutical manufacturing, and digital health systems. All facilities use digital platforms, with NST2 aiming for a fully paperless healthcare system. In 2023, Rwanda, in partnership with Germany Biotechnology Company BioNTech, set-up an mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility, the first of its kind on the African Continent. Once complete, the factory will be having the capacity to produce between 50 and 100 million doses of mRNA vaccines annually. Besides Covid-19 vaccines, the facility will also help conduct trials on new therapeutics for malaria, Tuberculosis, HIV, cancers and other diseases. vaccines manufactured in Rwanda will be distributed to other African Union member states at a not-for-profit price.
28. Moving to education, during the same period substantial progress was made in education, with the construction of over 27,000 classrooms and the expansion of Technical and Vocational schools from 200 to 396 sectors (out of 416) nationwide.
29. Furthermore, between 2013 and 2024, the education sector registered significant progress. The total number of teachers increased from 68,000 to 118,000, marking a 73% rise. The number of schools grew from 52,700 to 86,800, reflecting a 65% increase. Public schools more than doubled, rising from 14,600 to 30,300. Government-aided schools increased from 30,000 to 43,700, a growth of approximately 46%. Private schools expanded from 8,100 to 12,700, an increase of about 57%.
30. Gross enrollment for all students in this age group has shown significant progress, climbing from about 67% to 80%, an increase of 13%.
31. Dropout rates have steadily declined across all levels, though upper secondary still requires closer attention. In primary education, the rate dropped from 14.3% to 5.2%, a decrease of about nine percentage points. Lower secondary saw significant improvement, falling from 14.7% to 4.1%. Upper secondary also declined from 6.2% to 4.8%.
32. The number of learners receiving school meals surged from approximately 582,000 in 2013 to 4.38 million in 2023/24, marking a nearly 650% increase. This significant

expansion suggests that the feeding program may be contributing to improved attendance and retention, particularly at lower education levels.

33. Between 2013 and 2024, Rwanda distributed 333,146 cows to an equivalent number of households through the *Girinka* Programme (One Cow per Family Programme).
34. Between 2017 and 2024, direct support reached 1,110,555 vulnerable households, with older persons above 60 years accounting for 60% of the beneficiaries receiving monthly assistance. During the same period 14,547 vulnerable families were provided with furnished houses, a significant increase from 3,048 families in 2017. Additionally, 124 model villages were established.

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Members of the Committee,

35. As I conclude, Rwanda has made significant strides in advancing economic, social, and cultural rights, with strong collaborative partnerships between the government and various non-state actors. We deeply appreciate the collective efforts of all stakeholders who have contributed to these achievements.
36. While progress has been made, we acknowledge that challenges persist, particularly in addressing the socio-economic impacts of global crises, climate change, and the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and very recently the Marburg flu during the implementation period. These challenges underscore the continued need for targeted investments in critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and employment generation to ensure that progress remains inclusive and sustainable. Rwanda remains fully committed to the ongoing implementation of the Covenant and reaffirms our dedication to advancing the full realization of these rights for all Rwandans.
37. We are grateful for the support of international partners who have played a pivotal role in this journey, and we remain open to further collaboration in implementing recommendations. We value this opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Committee, benefiting from its expertise and strengthening our efforts toward realizing these rights

Thank you.