Republic of Rwanda
Ministry of Justice

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF RWANDA AT THE REVIEW OF ITS FIFTH PERIODIC REPORT BEFORE THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

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

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Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

1. It is an honour to address the Human Rights Committee as it considers Rwanda's fifth periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. On behalf of the Government of Rwanda, my delegation and I thank the Committee for this opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue on the progress achieved, the challenges that remain and the measures being taken to strengthen the implementation of the Covenant.

2. My name is Emmanuel UGIRASHEBUJA, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Rwanda. I am joined by H.E. Urujeni Bakuramutsa, Rwanda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva; Dr. Doris Picard Uwicyeza, Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Governance Board and Cabinet Member; and officials from Rwanda's Permanent Mission in Geneva.

3. Rwanda submitted its fifth periodic report in June 2025, covering developments since its previous dialogue with the Committee in 2016. The report was prepared through a participatory process coordinated by the Ministry of Justice through the National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF), which coordinates reporting on the implementation of international human rights instruments, including the Covenant. The NMIRF brings together representatives of public institutions, the National Commission for Human Rights, civil society and the private sector. The same consultative approach informed Rwanda's written replies to the Committee's List of Issues.

4. Rwanda attaches great importance to its engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms. The Committee's 2016 concluding observations and the recommendations supported during Rwanda's fourth Universal Periodic Review—including many relating to civil and political rights—are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Rwanda is integrating these recommendations into coordinated implementation measures and measurable national targets to strengthen the enjoyment of human rights by all Rwandans.

5. Rwanda's approach to civil and political rights must be understood within the country's history and its continuing commitment to national unity, equal citizenship, accountability and the rule of law. The experience of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi demonstrated the devastating consequences of discrimination, hate speech and institutional failure. Rwanda has therefore sought to build institutions that protect individual rights while preserving the unity and security necessary for every person to enjoy those rights.

Mr. Chairperson,
Members of the Committee,

CONSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

6. The Constitution guarantees the rights to life and physical integrity, equality and non-discrimination, liberty and security, privacy, a fair trial, and freedoms of thought, religion, expression, peaceful assembly and association, as well as the

right to participate in public affairs. Under article 169, duly ratified or approved treaties have the force of law in accordance with the constitutional hierarchy of norms. Rwanda abolished the death penalty in 2007, and the constitutional revisions adopted in 2023 did not alter Rwanda's obligations under the Covenant. This constitutional framework reflects the rights and principles protected by the Covenant and provides the foundation for their implementation at the national level.

7. Rwanda has strengthened the independence and capacity of the National Commission for Human Rights. Law No. 024/2026 of 11 June 2026 guarantees the Commission's legal personality and administrative and financial autonomy. The Commission receives and investigates complaints, engages public authorities and, as Rwanda's National Preventive Mechanism, conducts announced and unannounced visits to places where persons are or may be deprived of liberty. Its annual budget increased by approximately 111% between 2020/21 and 2026/27.

8. To improve accessibility, the Commission is progressively establishing four regional offices, beginning with two pilot offices funded in 2025/26. Pending their full operationalization, its nationwide reach is supported by approximately 4,404 human rights volunteers, a toll-free hotline and community outreach. Rwanda is also strengthening coordinated follow-up through a digital system designed to assign recommendations, record implementation measures and support periodic reporting.

Mr. Chairperson,

EQUALITY, GENDER AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE

9. Article 16 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination in all its forms. These guarantees are reinforced by criminal, labour and disability legislation and by policies addressing gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities. Consensual same-sex relations are not criminalized, and the constitutional protection against discrimination and equal access to public services applies to every person.

10. The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion coordinates Rwanda's national gender machinery, working with the Gender Monitoring Office, the National Women's Council, the National Child Development Agency and the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians. Their work is supported by gender-responsive budgeting, institutional gender focal points and the Gender Management Information System.

11. Rwanda continues to strengthen prevention of and accountability for gender-based violence. Forty-eight Isange One Stop Centres now provide coordinated medical, psychosocial, forensic, investigative and legal services, complemented by four temporary shelters and several toll-free reporting channels. Between January 2021 and June 2025, the National Public Prosecution Authority received 37,403 gender-based violence cases; 19,242 were filed before courts, and 14,815 perpetrators were convicted and sentenced.

12. Children in street situations are treated as children in need of protection and reintegration, not as offenders because of their social condition. During the period covered by the report, 8,072 children in street situations were reintegrated into families, while 3,571 children were moved from institutional to family-based care. Vagrancy, begging, homelessness and informal street vending are not criminal offences, and the framework governing preliminary and rehabilitation centres requires individual assessment, safeguards dignity and provides for independent oversight.

Mr. Chairperson,

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE, LIBERTY AND CORRECTIONAL REFORM

13. Judicial independence is protected by articles 151 and 152 of the Constitution and by legislation governing the Judiciary and the status of judges. Since 2016, the Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS) has connected justice-sector institutions and enabled the electronic filing, assignment and tracking of cases. The system currently has 308,282 active users, reflecting its expanding role in facilitating access to justice and improving coordination and efficiency across the

justice chain. Active case management, mediation and plea bargaining further contribute to reducing delays and supporting the timely resolution of cases.

14. The Criminal Justice Policy adopted in 2022 promotes alternatives to imprisonment and recognizes imprisonment as a measure of last resort, while advancing diversion, rehabilitation and restorative justice. Between the 2022/23 and 2025/26 financial years, 36,227 cases were resolved through plea bargaining and 1,857 through victim–offender mediation, bringing the combined total to 38,084 cases by June 2026. From 2016 to 2026, parole was granted to 23,938 persons. During the same period, 1,028 persons benefited from presidential pardons. Together with community service and other lawful measures, these approaches have supported reintegration and helped manage occupancy in correctional facilities.

15. Rwanda has continued to improve conditions and rehabilitation services in correctional facilities through targeted infrastructure upgrades and better access to bedding, water, sanitation, health care, education and vocational training. Although correctional facilities experienced overcrowding during earlier years, the national occupancy rate declined to 98.1 per cent by August 2026. Male and female inmates, and children and adults, are accommodated separately, while older persons and other particularly vulnerable inmates have a dedicated facility. Rwanda acknowledges that complete separation of persons on remand from convicted inmates has not yet been achieved, and ongoing infrastructure improvements seek to address this limitation.

16. Torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are prohibited by the Constitution and criminal law. Official custody and correctional facilities are subject to oversight by the National Commission for Human Rights. Legal assistance is available through Access to Justice Bureaus in all 30 districts, Government support to the Rwanda Bar Association and cooperation with civil-society legal-aid providers.

Mr. Chairperson,

REFUGEES, ASYLUM AND MIGRATION

17. Law No. 042/2024 governing refugees and applicants for refugee status expressly protects the principle of non-refoulement. It established an independent Appeal Tribunal whose decisions may be brought before the High Court under the amended law determining the jurisdiction of courts. Rwanda does not operate administrative detention for immigration offences; migrants are not deprived of liberty solely because of irregular entry, stay or immigration status.

18. Rwanda's engagement on migration and asylum is informed by its own history of displacement and commitment to international responsibility-sharing. Rwanda currently hosts nearly 140,000 refugees. Under the Emergency Transit Mechanism established with the African Union and UNHCR, Rwanda had also received 3,274 refugees and asylum-seekers evacuated from Libya by 15 September 2026. Most had attained durable solutions, while 684 remained at the Emergency Transit Centre, where they continue to receive accommodation, protection and essential services as durable solutions are pursued. These efforts reflect Rwanda's commitment to protecting, without discrimination, the dignity and Covenant rights of all persons within its territory.

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the committee,

FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

19. Rwanda has continued to strengthen the legal framework governing freedom of expression and the media. Law No. 69/2019 of 8 November 2019 decriminalized defamation and press offences and removed the offence of insulting or defaming the President. In its judgment of 24 April 2019, the Supreme Court invalidated provisions criminalizing public defamation of religious rituals and the humiliation of public authorities and officials. Further, Law No. 059/2023 repealed article 218 concerning the humiliation or insult of specified foreign officials.

20. The Media Law prohibits censorship and protects journalistic sources. Revision of the 2011 Media Policy is at an advanced stage following consultations with media stakeholders, while professional development and public awareness on media freedom and access to information continue.

21. The Constitution protects privacy and the confidentiality of correspondence and communications. Law No. 058/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy provides rights of access, rectification and, where applicable, erasure, and establishes regulatory supervision and complaint mechanisms. Any lawful interception of communications must have a statutory purpose and prior written authorization by the Prosecutor General, and remains subject to complaint procedures and judicial remedies.

22. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, association and peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed. Rwanda continues to review the implementation of the framework governing faith-based organizations so that any restriction is lawful, necessary and proportionate. Law No. 058/2024 governing non-governmental organizations was adopted following stakeholder consultations and provides for legal personality, governance, property management, reporting and accountability. Rwanda remains open to reviewing its implementation in consultation with civil society.

23. The 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections were administered under the electoral law. Eleven registered political parties participated, and three candidates contested the presidential election, including an independent candidate. Domestic and international observers were accredited, candidate representatives observed polling, and missions from the African Union and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa reported peaceful and orderly voting at the polling stations they observed.

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,

THE COVENANTS AT 60: RWANDA'S CONTINUING COMMITMENT

24. As I conclude, allow me to place today's dialogue within an important historical context. This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Although today's review concerns Rwanda's implementation of the ICCPR, the two Covenants were adopted together in 1966 as complementary pillars of the international human rights framework, reflecting the interdependence and equal importance of all human rights.

25. Rwanda acceded to both Covenants in 1975. Our subsequent history, including the discrimination and exclusion that culminated in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, demonstrates that adherence to international instruments must be translated into consistent and effective protection for every person. Rwanda's post-Genocide experience—securing justice, rebuilding institutions, restoring social cohesion and responding to pressing socioeconomic needs—underscores that civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights cannot be placed in a hierarchy: each is essential to human dignity, sustainable development and lasting peace.

26. Rwanda recognizes that implementation of the Covenant is a continuing process. The progress presented today has benefited from the contribution of national and international stakeholders, including civil society organizations, development partners and United Nations agencies. We particularly acknowledge the civil society representatives, including those who have travelled from Rwanda to participate in this review and contribute their perspectives. Rwanda values these partnerships and will continue working with all relevant stakeholders to strengthen its legal, policy and institutional frameworks and translate its obligations into practical improvements in the enjoyment of rights.

27. We thank the Human Rights Committee for its continued collaboration throughout the reporting and review process. Rwanda reaffirms its commitment to implementing the Covenant and approaches this dialogue in a spirit of respect and constructive engagement. We look forward to the Committee's questions and observations and remain committed to appropriate follow-up action arising from this dialogue. **I Thank you.**