Millions of people in Africa still lack reliable access to cooling, even as refrigeration becomes increasingly important for food preservation, healthcare and protection against extreme heat. The gap was a central concern raised by Rwanda's Prime Minister Justin Nsengiyumva as countries gathered in Kigali to review progress under the Montreal Protocol.

Speaking on November 5 at the high-level segment of the 38th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol (MOP38), Nsengiyumva urged governments to measure the success of their commitments by the changes they bring to people's lives.

Rwanda's Prime Minister Justin Nsengiyumva

"The measure of our success is not what we commit to, but the changes those commitments bring to the world," he said.

Reliable cooling is essential to farmers who need cold storage to preserve produce before it reaches markets, as well as health facilities that depend on refrigeration to keep vaccines and medicines safe. It is also increasingly important for people exposed to extreme temperatures.

However, access remains limited in many parts of Africa, where electricity supply is either unavailable or unreliable. Nsengiyumva said expanding cooling services must go hand in hand with the use of technologies that consume less energy and have a lower impact on the climate.

He said the transition should involve more than replacing one type of cooling technology with another. Countries also need to invest in infrastructure, develop technical skills and support local industries and innovation so they can benefit from the shift.

Rwanda is among the countries seeking to build capacity in this area through the Africa Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Cooling and Cold-chain (ACES). Based in Rwanda, the centre brings together research, training, technology development and practical application, with a mandate to serve countries across the continent.

Nsengiyumva called for stronger South-South cooperation and international partnerships, saying developing countries should have the resources and expertise

to participate fully in shaping the transition to sustainable cooling.

The meeting is also taking place as parties negotiate the replenishment of the Montreal Protocol's Multilateral Fund for the 2027–2029 period. The fund supports developing countries in meeting their obligations under the agreement, making its next funding level an important issue for implementation.

In a speech delivered at MOP38, United Nations Environment Programme Deputy Executive Director Elizabeth Maruma Mrema said the replenishment should provide the resources needed to implement the Kigali Amendment and promote sustainable cooling over the long term.

The Kigali Amendment, adopted in Kigali in October 2016, requires countries to gradually reduce the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). These gases are widely used in refrigeration and air conditioning and contribute to global warming.

The amendment marked an expansion of the Montreal Protocol, which was adopted in 1987 to protect the ozone layer by phasing out substances that deplete it.

MOP38, taking place from November 2 to 6, marks 10 years since the Kigali Amendment was adopted. Delegates are reviewing implementation progress and considering what further action and support are needed.

The next decade, Nsengiyumva said, should be judged not only by the commitments countries make but by the results they achieve.