

The President of Rwanda's Supreme Court, Domitilla Mukantaganzwa has urged judges from the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) to draw lessons from Rwanda's unique justice system, particularly the Gacaca Courts and reconciliation-based justice.

Speaking at the opening of the EACJ's third Annual Judges' Forum in Kigali, on February 18, 2025, Madam Mukantaganzwa highlighted how Rwanda's Gacaca Courts played a crucial role in delivering justice after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Over ten years, the courts helped resolve nearly two million cases, allowing the country to heal from the devastating loss of over a million lives.

"The Gacaca Courts allowed us to address justice swiftly when traditional courts couldn't. It was an approach rooted in our culture of resolving conflicts peacefully through dialogue and mediation," she said.



*Domitilla Mukantaganzwa, the President of Rwanda's Supreme Court*

Following the genocide, Rwanda's legal system was in ruins. Few people had legal training, and thousands of genocide suspects needed to be tried. This was when the Gacaca system emerged, helping to deliver justice, foster reconciliation, and bring healing to a divided society. "We had to find new ways to deal with a situation where the justice system had almost collapsed. That's when we turned to Gacaca," Madam Mukantaganzwa explained.

She emphasized that the Gacaca system was based on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), a method that avoids lengthy and formal court processes. This approach not only helped restore order but also encouraged forgiveness and healing in the aftermath of the genocide.

Rwanda's commitment to reconciliation continues today, with ADR being used to resolve conflicts without resorting to lengthy legal battles. Madam Mukantaganzwa encouraged the EACJ to embrace similar approaches, stressing that this could make justice more accessible in the region.

"I urge everyone here to consider how we can use ADR methods to make justice easier to reach for the people we serve. This approach can be especially effective at the regional level," she said.

The EACJ, based in Arusha, Tanzania, plays a key role in resolving disputes across the East African region. While it typically handles cases through formal legal procedures, Madam Mukantaganzwa's remarks emphasized the value of complementing this with mediation, which can help resolve issues more quickly and effectively.

Veronica Nduva, the EAC Secretary-General, also spoke about the importance of ensuring the people of East Africa understand that the EACJ is there to help them. "We want the 300 million people in our region to know that there is a court they can turn to for justice, one that can address their needs and improve their lives," she said.

Nestor Kayobera, President of the EACJ, pointed out that financial challenges are a major barrier to the court's work. He appealed for more support from member states to ensure the court can fulfill its vital role.

Over 250 participants are attending the forum in Kigali, including judges, justice ministers, and legal professionals from East Africa. The event serves as a platform to discuss ways to strengthen regional justice systems.

Madam Mukantaganzwa concluded her speech by reminding everyone that justice is a collective responsibility. "We must all work together to ensure that justice reaches everyone who needs it, and that the rule of law is upheld across all levels," she said.

This year's forum marks the third time the EACJ judges have gathered, following previous meetings in Burundi in 2021 and Uganda in 2022.