

Internship Report
Supreme Court of the Republic of Rwanda

Edited by

First name: Karl

Last name: Wachtel

I. General

From March 1st to April 1st, 2023, I had the opportunity to complete an on-site internship at the Supreme Court Office in Kigali, Rwanda. My role primarily involved analyzing court rulings related to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda from the perspective of a German law student, with the aim of offering a comparative understanding while fully respecting the local context and legal framework.

II. Work Surroundings

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Rwanda is located in Kigali, one of the safest and cleanest cities in Africa. As Rwanda's economic hub, Kigali plays a vital role in the country's development and growth. The city's international influence is evident in its diverse culinary scene, vibrant nightlife, and variety of recreational activities, all of which create a dynamic and welcoming atmosphere. During my stay, I found the nightlife lively and safe, with no issues encountered, even when staying out late.

Kigali's multicultural appeal draws people from around the world, contributing to its dynamic charm. The surrounding towns further enrich the experience with unique cultural and historical attractions that are well worth exploring.

Transportation in Kigali is primarily provided through taxis, motorcycle-taxis, and buses, supported by a reliable infrastructure with well-maintained roads and a stable electricity supply. The tropical highland climate offers mild temperatures between 15 and 25°C, moderated by Kigali's elevation. Rwanda experiences two rainy seasons (March–May and October–December) and two dry seasons (June–September and December–February).

Most transactions in Kigali are facilitated through *mobile money*, a system that operates via a digital wallet linked to a Rwandan phone number. It enables seamless payments for transferring money, paying bills, and making purchases, even without a traditional bank account. Setting up *mobile money* is straightforward and can be done easily when acquiring a local phone number.

III. Internship Evaluation Summary

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Rwanda is deeply committed to promoting social justice, human rights, and the rule of law. The court addresses a wide range of cases, including constitutional, civil, criminal, and administrative matters.

During my internship, I was assigned a dedicated contact person who was accessible during working hours and also available outside of work to assist with any challenges I faced in my daily life in Kigali. The internship was exceptionally well-organized, reflecting the Supreme Court's experience in hosting interns, particularly through ongoing partnerships with well-known American universities. This expertise ensured a seamless integration for external interns unfamiliar with the Rwandan legal system.

I was provided with my own office, which I shared with my contact person, fostering a collaborative and supportive working environment. The dress code at the Supreme Court is formal, and working hours typically span from 9:00 AM to 5:00 or 6:00 PM. Additionally, I had the opportunity to connect with other interns from Rwanda, with whom I quickly formed a professional and personal relationship, further enriching my internship experience.

The Supreme Court is housed in a tall, multi-story building located in an area with numerous restaurants, making it convenient for lunch breaks. Additionally, the building features a rooftop terrace, offering a space to relax and enjoy the view. The Supreme Court also has its own library, stocked with an extensive collection of legal commentaries and books that are crucial for completing tasks assigned by the judges. Moreover, internet access is available throughout the building, which is particularly beneficial for conducting legal research.

IV. Summary of Activities/Tasks

During my internship, I received my tasks exclusively from one of the Supreme Court judges, all of which were rooted in legal matters. My primary responsibility was drafting a legal opinion on the case of *Mugesera v. The Republic of Rwanda*, which was later published on the African Legal Studies blog (*africanlegalstudies.blog*). In this case, the Court of Appeal sentenced Léon Mugesera to life imprisonment under the Rwandan Penal Code for public and direct incitement to commit genocide and crimes against humanity. Drafting the legal opinion, written in English, required a detailed analysis of the Rwandan Penal Code, the ICTR Statute, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Additionally, I conducted legal research and analyzed several judgments. Throughout these tasks, I felt taken seriously, as my opinions and contributions were genuinely valued. The staff at the Supreme Court were incredibly friendly and always willing to

assist, fostering a supportive environment. From the very beginning, I felt like an integral part of the team, which greatly enriched my experience.

V. Conclusion

This internship provided me with the opportunity to explore other legal jurisdictions and gain valuable insights into international criminal law. I also learned about Rwanda's remarkable recovery as a society following the genocide, including its innovative legal solutions, such as the Gacaca Courts, which addressed justice and reconciliation. In addition, I had the chance to study and appreciate Rwanda's rich history and culture, deepening my understanding of the country and its people.

What stood out most to me was the collaborative work culture at the Supreme Court. While maintaining a professional environment, the Supreme Court emphasized teamwork, open communication, and a supportive environment. This experience not only broadened my horizons but also allowed me to build lasting friendships in Rwanda, with whom I still stay in regular contact today. Overall, this internship has been an invaluable experience that has enriched both my personal and professional development.

Bayreuth, January 16, 2025; Karl Wachtel (4th-year law student)