

Gambia Plans to Withdraw from International Criminal Court



The Hague, October 26 (RHC)-- Gambia has followed in the footsteps of Burundi and South Africa by declaring its intention to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC). The West African country's Information Minister Sheriff Bojang announced the decision on television Tuesday night, accusing the ICC of being biased against Africa.

Bojang said that the court -- set up to pursue some of the world's worst crimes -- had been used "for the persecution of Africans and especially their leaders" while ignoring crimes committed by the West. He singled out the case of Tony Blair, a former British prime minister, whom the ICC failed to indict over the 2003 Iraq war.

"There are many Western countries, at least 30, that have committed heinous war crimes against independent sovereign states and their citizens since the creation of the ICC and not a single Western war criminal has been indicted," the Gambian minister said. And he added that the tribunal was an "international Caucasian court for the persecution and humiliation of people of color, especially Africans."

The minister said Gambia has begun the process of withdrawing from the ICC, which involves notifying the United Nations secretary general and takes effect a year after the notification is received. The ICC's chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, is ironically a former Gambian justice minister.

Only Africans have been charged in the six ICC cases that are ongoing or about to begin, though preliminary investigations have opened elsewhere. The ICC has opened probes involving Kenya, the Ivory Coast, Libya, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Uganda and Mali.

The International Criminal Court was set up in 2002 to try war criminals and the perpetrators of genocide.

Last Friday, the South African government gave a formal notice of its intention to pull out of the ICC. Earlier that week, Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza had signed a decree to quit the court's jurisdiction.

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