

Who's Antoine Anfré, the new French envoy to Rwanda ?

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Antoine Anfré is the new Ambassador of France to Rwanda.

A cabinet meeting Saturday, June 12, approved Antoine Anfré as the new Ambassador of France to Rwanda.

The development is the culmination of years of diplomatic efforts designed to repair bilateral ties after 27 years.

France did not have an ambassador to Rwanda for about six years due to icy relations as a result of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, executed by a regime that enjoyed the backing of Paris.

The last French envoy to Rwanda, Michel Flesch, left Kigali in September 2015. Since then, French interests were being managed by a chargé d'affaires – an official acting as head of diplomatic mission during the absence of a substantive ambassador.

Jérémy Blin, the current Chargé d'Affaires, took office in 2019.

On May 27, French President Emmanuel Macron made a historic visit to Rwanda and recognised the magnitude of France's responsibilities in the Genocide. He asked for forgiveness from Genocide survivors and expressed solidarity with them.

The visit was seen as a good step towards the normalisation of relations between the two countries. The president announced the imminent appointment of an ambassador to Rwanda.

Anfré, 58, is a diplomat familiar with Africa, specifically in the Great Lakes Region.

He held different diplomatic roles, including serving as the first secretary of the French Embassy in Uganda, then as editor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire (current DR Congo) and Tanzania in the 1990s.

A graduate from the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) and National School of Administration (ENA) in France, he also held the positions of sub-prefect of Limoux (Aude) between 2000 and 2003, and of first embassy counsellor in Nairobi and Ankara from 2006 to 2009.

He also served as Embassy Counsellor in London from 2011 to 2014, and as ambassador of France to Niger in 2015.

'Sidelined over Rwanda warnings'

Anfré has extensive knowledge about Rwanda, according to available information.

He is cited several times in a recent report by a French commission of experts led by historian Vincent Duclert, which had been tasked with consulting France's archives relating to the Genocide in order to analyse the role and engagement of Paris in the atrocities from 1990 to 1994.

The commission was formed by President Macron in April 2019.

The Duclert Commission report, among others, indicated that France bears heavy and overwhelming responsibilities over the 1994 Genocide. The government of Rwanda has welcomed the report.

In the report, the personal notes that Anfré wrote on Rwanda in the early 1990s, alerted the French authorities about the situation in Rwanda.

He suggested a redesign of France's strategy on Rwanda at the time with view to averting a probable tragedy, instead of supporting – including financing – the then Juvenal Habyarimana regime.

However, the Duclert report showed that not only was Anfré not listened to, but he was sidelined and forced to leave the Directorate (of African and Malagasy affairs at French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) at the time.