Congo Republic parties petition government to withdraw from ICC

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Two parties in Congo Republic’s ruling coalition petitioned the government late on Thursday to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC), a move that threatens to deal a fresh blow to the tribunal in The Hague.

African states have long complained of ICC bias against Africans. Last month, South Africa and Burundi became the first countries to officially notify the United Nations of their intention to pull out of the Rome Statute, the 1998 treaty establishing the ICC.

Gambia also said last month that it would withdraw, accusing the court of ignoring the “war crimes” of Western nations and seeking only to prosecute Africans.

The two Congolese parties, the Patriotic Front and the 2020 Awakening Movement, led a protest march of about 300 people in the capital Brazzaville, where they argued that court membership was incompatible with a provision in Congo’s constitution that forbids extradition to “a foreign power or organization”.

“This measure in our constitution contradicts the operational mode of the ICC, which aims to ask signatory countries to hand over their citizens for whatever reason,” Paolo Benaza, the spokesman for the Patriotic Front, told reporters.

The head of the Patriotic Front is Congo’s youth minister, Destinee Hermella Doukaga.

The two parties delivered a memorandum to Justice Minister Pierre Mabiala, who said he would study the proposal before making a recommendation to the government.

The ICC opened in July 2002 and has 124 member states. It is the first legal body with permanent international jurisdiction to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Defenders of the ICC say the accusations of bias against Africans are unfair as the vast majority of requests for ICC intervention have come from African governments themselves, who often lack the capacity to try such complex cases.