



THE ISSUE:

Rwanda's government frequently trumpets its democratic system, developed since the military conclusion of the 1994 genocide. In reality, the country's government has severely restricted human rights. Although international donors often describe the country as a successful model of development, the price of development has been the forced subordination of the population so that no criticisms of the state are tolerated. This has resulted in elections with opposition parties largely suppressed, and opposition candidates imprisoned or driven out of the country or assassinated. It has further resulted in the suppression of freedom of the press, and suppression of independent human rights organizations. In short, it bears the marks of a police state, under the guise of a democracy.

Freedom of expression in Rwanda is severely restricted at all levels. Independent civil society and media have been decimated; political opponents face numerous obstacles to operate and have been imprisoned and attacked; legislation and the mere threat of prosecution for genocide ideology have a chilling effect on public discourse and encourage self-censorship. Following the presidential election in 2017 and amendments to the constitution that allow President Kagame to stand for three more terms, restrictions on political space continue to be of concern.

The Rwandan government has been credibly accused of extra-judicial killings of opposition figures. It has arrested important figures and held them in prison for long periods. More pertinently, it has assiduously pursued a policy of quashing any expressions of opposition, not only among political parties, or in military entities, but among the civilian population. There is little to no real freedom of expression in the Rwandan press, human rights organizations have limited margins to act, and no credible statements of opposition to any government policies are tolerated.

TALKING POINTS:

- Rwanda is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Union Charter on Human Rights, both of which protect freedom of expression, association and assembly. We therefore call upon the Kagame administration to release all prisoners of conscience, including Jackie Umuhoza.

THE HUMAN COST:

Jackie Umuhoza, daughter of exiled pastor Deo Nyirigira, was arrested on the morning of November 27, 2019 in Kigali. After her family and friends raised the alarm on social media the next day, the Rwanda Investigation Bureau confirmed on Twitter that Jackie Umuhoza had been arrested on suspicion of treason and espionage. She remains in detention without having been brought before a judge. Her detention follows a familiar pattern of harassment and arbitrary detention by the government against critics and their family members

- President Kagame must address the culture of fear and intimidation drowning Rwanda. He can do this by ensuring a credible independent investigation into the death of people like Syldio Dusabumuremyi and the other FDU-Inkingi party members who have been found dead or who have disappeared without a trace.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The White House should write to President Kagame and urge him to release all prisoners of conscience, including Jackie Umuhoza. .
- As part of improving respect for human rights and the rule of law in Rwanda the White House should mandate the Department of State to prioritize expanding programs to strengthen the independence of the Rwandan judiciary.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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