

Rwanda



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Update

A draft law to further regulate NGOs in Rwanda passed a first reading in parliament in April 2024. Civil society is concerned that the legislation will limit civic space in a country where the government has a record of stifling dissent and press freedoms. The draft law received 45 votes in a parliament that is heavily controlled by President Paul Kagame's ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front, and not a single vote was cast against it. The draft law subsequently moved to a parliamentary committee for further scrutiny. The draft legislation, if passed, would require NGOs to submit their operating plans and budgets to the authorities for approval and provide regulators with the power to interfere in the day-to-day management of NGOs, including firing staff. President Paul Kagame's win with 99% of the vote in the Rwandan presidential elections in July 2024 in which three critics

of Kagame were banned from running makes it more likely this draft law will eventually be passed. Please see the Pending NGO Legislative/Regulatory Initiatives and News Items sections below in this report for additional details.

Introduction

In Rwanda, civil society is rooted in farmers' associations that were established in the 1950s and that were answerable to the Church. In 1994, Rwanda experienced a devastating genocide perpetrated against Tutsis, which left more than 800,000 people dead. In the aftermath of the genocide, civil society organizations (CSOs) emerged to help in addressing social needs, including assistance to widows and orphans, child-led households, and traumatized survivors, while other CSOs were focused on promoting reconciliation, good governance, and human rights. Even though these CSOs have made important and lasting contributions, the people of Rwanda continue to suffer from high levels of collective trauma and struggle with the social consequences of the genocide.

Rwanda's economy is one of the fastest growing in Africa today. This expansion has been driven by growth in the agriculture, industry, and service sectors. With the onset of COVID-19, however, international flows of goods and services have been seriously disrupted, which has had significant effects on Rwanda's economy.

Rwanda has also articulated a bold vision to become carbon-neutral by 2050, with ambitious climate adaptation and mitigation interventions, at a cost of \$11 billion by 2030. But the country faces challenges mobilizing private financing due to high upfront capital needs for key projects, financing costs from banks, and collateral requirements. To address these challenges, it launched the Rwanda Green Investment Fund at the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Civil society remains a strategic partner for the government to achieve its development goals because it can carry out interventions through a diversity of national and international organizations, which support the citizens' socioeconomic advancement. However, despite developing its governance structures, maintaining security, promoting reconciliation, and strengthening the justice system, Rwanda still scores considerably lower in terms of its democracy, governance, and human rights ratings than its economics ratings.

The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) also exerts nearly total control over political space in Rwanda. Civil society in Rwanda accordingly remains in an embryonic state due to a variety of such constraints. The operating environment for civil society is one of enforced collaboration with the government's political and development plans.

The legal framework for civil society in Rwanda underwent reform in 2008 after the enactment of Organic Law No. 55/2008 of 10/09/2008 governing Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This 2008 law and subsequent laws were a result of extensive consultation. However, any positive impact of these laws on civil society in Rwanda has been minimal due to inadequate implementation.

This Civic Freedom Monitor (CFM) country note was made possible through the research conducted by Joseph Kasongo.

At a Glance

Organizational Forms	National and International NGOs
Registration Body	Domestic NPOs have two-tiered registration process with a) collaboration letter of the District issued by the mayor of the District and b) Action Plan of the fiscal year and authenticated statute needed

	for an application to the CEO of the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB). The RGB allows only 6 months for the receipt of provisional permit from local authority (collaboration letter from the District). There are also excessive documentation requirements. The RGB was formed from merging the Rwanda Governance Advisory Council (RGAC) and the National Decentralization Implementation Secretariat (NDIS). It is a public agency with legal personality and administrative and financial autonomy, and is established by Law no. 56/2016 of 16/12/2016 establishing the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) and determining its mission, organization and functioning.
Approximate Number	2085 Registered National Non-Governmental organizations 206 Registered International Non-Governmental Organizations 576 Registered Faith-Based Organizations 11 Registered political organizations 5 Registered Foundations (The above is based on Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) statistics from June 2021)
Barriers to Entry	Domestic NPOs: (1) two-tiered registration process with action plan presented to local authority and application to the CEO of the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB); (2) lengthy registration process, with application to Ministry allowed only 6 months after receipt of provisional permit from local authority; and (3) additional documents may be requested when applying for registration. Foreign NPOs: Detailed documentation requirements at the time of registration.
Barriers to Activities	Ministry approval required for decisions relating to NPO's statutes and for NPO's legal representatives and their assistants. Administrative expenses are limited to 30% of the NPO's overall budget. NPOs must incorporate governmental priorities into their mission. A Memorandum of Understanding and performance contract is needed with the District where activities are carried out.
Barriers to Speech and/or Advocacy	No legal barriers, assuming an organization's compliance with constitutional boundaries. However, human right activists have argued that restrictions on freedom of speech in Rwanda persist. While a growing number of social media, televisions, and radio stations broadcast programs expressing critical views of the government, pro-government views still dominate domestic media.

Barriers to International Contact	No legal barriers.
Barriers to Resources	No legal barriers.
Barriers to Assembly	Five days advance notification requirement; excessive criminal and financial penalties for violations, especially for assemblies held on public roadways.

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Key Indicators

Population	12,943,132 (July 2021 est.)
Capital	Kigali
Type of Government	Republic; presidential, multiparty system
Life Expectancy at Birth	male: 63.55; female: 67.47 (65.48 years average) (July 2021 est.)
Literacy Rate	male: 77.6%; 69.4% (73.2% average) (2018 est.)
Religious Groups	Protestant 49.5% (includes Adventist 11.8% and other Protestant 37.7%), Roman Catholic 43.7%, Muslim 2%, other 0.9% (includes Jehovah's Witness), none 2.5%, unspecified 1.3% (2012 est.)
Ethnic Groups	Hutu (Bantu) 84%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 15%, Twa (Pygmy) 1%
GDP per capita	\$834 (2021 est.)

Source: [The World Factbook](#). Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency; and Rwanda Demographic Profile.

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International Rankings

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best – worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	161 (2023)	1 – 193
World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	41 (2023)	1 – 142
Transparency International	49 (2023)	1 – 180

Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Not Free Political Rights: 8 Civil Liberties: 15 (2024)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 1 – 40 1 – 60
Foreign Policy: Fragile States Index	46 (2024)	179 – 1

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Legal Snapshot

International and Regional Human Rights Agreements

Key International Agreements	Ratification*	Year
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	Yes	1975
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No	—
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	Yes	1975
Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention	Yes	1988
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	Yes	1975
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	Yes	1981
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	No	—
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	Yes	1989
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	No	—
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	Yes	2008
Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT)	Yes	2015
Convention against Torture (CAT)	Yes	2008
Regional Treaties		

African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights	Yes	2003
Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region	Yes	2006
Paris Agreement on Climate Change	Yes	2016
African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance	Yes	2012
Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide	Yes	2008

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda was adopted by referendum in May 2003 and revised through referendum several times, most recently in 2015.

Relevant constitutional provisions include:

Article 37: Freedom of conscience and religion • Freedom of opinion/thought/conscience Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship and public manifestation thereof is guaranteed by the State in accordance with the law. Propagation of ethnic, regional, racial discrimination or any other form of division is punished by law.

Article 38: Freedom of press, of expression and of access to information, Freedom of press Freedom of press, of expression and of access to information are recognized and guaranteed by the State.

Freedom of expression and freedom of access to information shall not prejudice public order, good morals, the protection of the youth and children, the right of every citizen to honor and dignity and protection of personal and family privacy.

Article 39: Right to freedom of association.

The right to freedom of association is guaranteed and does not require prior authorization. This right is exercised under conditions determined by law.

Article 40: Right to freedom of assembly

The right to freedom of peaceful and unarmed assembly is guaranteed. This right is exercised in accordance with the law. This right does not require prior authorization, except when provided for by the law.

National Laws and Regulations Affecting Sector

Relevant national-level laws and regulations affecting civil society include:

- Organic Law 55/2008 of 10/09/2008 Governing Non-Governmental Organizations;

- Law Number 04/2012 of 17/02/2012 Governing the Organization and Functioning of National Non-Governmental Organizations;
- Law Number 05/2012 of 17/02/2012 Governing the Organization and Functioning of International Non-Governmental Organizations;
- Law Number 06/2012 of 17/02/2012 Governing the Organization and Functioning of Religious-Based Organizations;
- Ministerial order N° 001/07.01 OF 14/01/2013 Determining Additional Requirements for the Registration of Religious-based Organizations;
- Organic Law N° 10/2013/OL of 11/07/2013 Governing Political Organizations and Politicians;
- Law N° 47/2012 of 14/01/2013 relating to the Regulation and Inspection of Food and Pharmaceutical Products;
- Law N° 37/2012 of 09/11/2012 establishing the Value Added Tax (especially in Article 6 Paragraph 2 and other regulations);
- Law N° 72/2018 of 31/08/2018 determining the organization and functioning of faith-based organizations;
- Organic Law N° 005/2018 of 30/08/2018 modifying organic law N° 10/2013/ol. of 11/07/2013 governing political organizations and politicians;
- Regulations of Rwanda Governance Board N° 001 of 08/03/2019 governing faith-based organizations;
- Law N° 2/2013 on Regulating Media in Rwanda;
- Law N° 4/2013 of 08/02/2013 Relating to Access to Information; and
- Law Governing Foundations No 059/2021 OF 14/10/2021.

Pending NGO Legislative / Regulatory Initiatives

A draft law to further regulate NGOs in Rwanda passed a first reading in parliament in April 2024. Civil society is concerned that the legislation will limit civic space in a country where the government has a record of stifling dissent and press freedoms. The draft law received 45 votes in a parliament that is heavily controlled by President Paul Kagame's ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front, and not a single vote was cast against it. The draft law will now move to the lower chamber of the Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs for further scrutiny. The draft legislation, if passed, would require NGOs to submit their operating plans and budgets to the authorities for approval and provide regulators with the power to interfere in the day-to-day management of NGOs, including firing staff. In addition, NGOs would be required to not exceed 20 per cent of their operating budget in programs that are deemed to be not in the interest of their beneficiaries. The draft law was suspected of being rushed through before the presidential and legislative elections on July 15, 2024. However, despite President Paul Kagame's winning the presidency with 99% of the vote, as of November 2024, the draft law remains pending.

Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

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Legal Analysis

Organizational Forms

The Organic Law Governing Non-Governmental Organizations (Law 55/2008 of 10/09/2008) defines non-governmental organizations as organizations that are comprised of natural persons or of autonomous collective voluntary organizations whose aim is to improve economic, social and cultural development and to advocate for public interests of a certain group, natural persons, organizations or with the view of promoting common interest of their members. In order to make

the Organic Law operational, three laws were enacted in 2012, relating to three separate organizational forms:

- 1) National NGOs;
- 2) International NGOs operating in Rwanda; and
- 3) Religious-based organizations.

Law No. 4/2012 regarding National NGOs creates three categories of National NGOs: Public Interest Organizations, Common Interest Organizations, and Foundations. (Article 3)

Both National and International NGOs must register and then obtain legal personality in order to operate legally.

Public Benefit Status

There is no separate and additional “public benefit” status under Rwandan law. Once an organization has legal personality (regardless of which category of National NGO), it enjoys tax exemptions and other privileges in accordance with relevant laws. (Article 28, paragraph 5)

NGOs holding a Memoranda of Understanding with the Ministry of Health and the Government of Rwanda receive a health commodities tax exemption.

Public Participation

Article 48 of the Constitution of Rwanda affirms that all Rwandans have the duty to participate in the development and defense of the country by safeguarding peace, democracy, equality, and social justice. Article 11 of the Constitution provides that in order to build the nation and restore dignity, Rwandans may pursue “homegrown initiatives” based on their own values.

Law No. 4/2012 regarding National NGOs provides NGOs with the right “to put forward views in designing national policies and legislation in relation with the functioning of national non-governmental organizations; to advocate, protect and promote human rights and other national values; and to express opinions and views on national policies and legislation” (Article 28 paragraphs 1-3).

There are also state-sanctioned mechanisms for citizen participation. For example, the National *Umushyikirano* Council (or National Dialogue council) (Article 140 of the Constitution) brings together the President and citizens’ representatives to discuss issues of public importance. Some NGOs do not view the Council as a preferred mechanism to conduct advocacy due to the large number of participants and short time span (two days). *Ubudehe* refers to the long-standing Rwandan practice and culture of collective action and mutual support to solve problems within a community. *Ubudehe* is one of Rwanda’s best known “homegrown initiatives” because of its participatory development approach to poverty reduction. The Joint Action Development Forum (JADF) was established as a stakeholder forum at the district level and as a community assembly (*intekoz’abaturage*) at the local level through the ministerial order called Prime Minister’s Instructions No. 003/03 of 03/07/2015 establishing the Joint Action Development Forum and determining its responsibilities, organization, and functioning.

Rwanda has taken steps to allow for the participation of women and vulnerable groups. Notably, the majority of parliamentarians are women, who are guaranteed 30% of the seats in the parliament. In addition, people with disabilities have a voice in parliament and receive support from the government and NGOs. Youth (between 16 and 30 years of age), who comprise the majority of the Rwandan population, receive support from various bodies, including the National Youth Council and National Women’s Council.

Law No. 44 of September 6, 2017 provides protection for whistleblowers. Article 3 empowers citizens to denounce abuses by government officials and private institutions. Article 9 requires the State to ensure the security and protection of a whistleblower. Article 12 provides that if a whistleblower is summoned to court, his or her identity must not be disclosed, and if subject to interrogation, the procedure must be held in camera and without cross-examination.

Barriers to Entry

Under the current law, NGOs struggle to obtain documents they need to operate in a timely fashion. Obtaining legal personality is also not automatic. The authorities may also request additional documentation from NGOs when they apply for registration.

Article 17 of Law 04/2012 stipulates that national NGOs will be issued a temporary certificate of registration valid for twelve months. A national NGO will then apply for legal personality nine months after the issue of the first temporary certificate. According to implementing rules promulgated by the Rwanda Governance Board, the requirements for National NGOs to obtain legal personality are the following:

1. Application Letter Addressed to the CEO of Rwanda Governance Board;
2. Authenticated statutes in conformity with the Law 04/2012;
3. Document showing the organization's head office and its full address;
4. The name of the Legal Representative of the organization, the name of his/her deputy, their duties, full address, CV and their judicial records;
5. The minutes of the general assembly which appointed the Legal Representative of the organization and the signatures of all the members that attended such general assembly meeting;
6. Action plan for the fiscal year;
7. Original District Collaboration letter.

International NGOs are also required to submit a long list of documentation and information, including the implementation schedule and its various stages of planning, detailed cost estimates with data, an indication of who will continue activities launched by international NGOs after they have completed their work, and "all information relating to its geographical establishment throughout the world."

Barriers to Operational Activity

National NGOs may be denied registration or subject to termination for the failure to comply with legislation or "convincing evidence that the [applicant] may jeopardize security, public, order, health, morals, and human rights." (Articles 20 and 24). Once an NGO is registered, it must become a member of the [Joint Action Development Forum \(JDAF\)](#).

Administrative expenses for an international NGO shall not exceed 20% of its budget for programs that are not in the interest of its beneficiaries. (Article 18.4)

A Memorandum of Understanding and performance contract must be concluded between NGOs and the district authorities where the NGO's activities are carried out to ensure its activities are in line with the district's priorities. NGOs with projects not in line with those priorities may not be registered. As noted in the Barriers to Entry section, NGOs must sign an "Original District Collaboration letter" when they register (this is also known as a "Memorandum of Understanding" or a "Letter of Partnership").

The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) monitors the service delivery and governance of domestic and international NGOs. Each year the authorities require NGOs to submit specific reports, including updated planning and cost estimates. Such reports also require information about international NGO staff members to be provided after they complete their work assignments.

Barriers to Speech / Advocacy

There are no legal provisions expressly prohibiting speech or advocacy by NGOs. According to Article 37 of the Constitution, the *“Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship and public manifestation thereof is guaranteed by the State in accordance with the law. Propagation of ethnic, regional, racial discrimination or any other form of division is punished by law.”* Article 38 of the Constitution also states that *“Freedom of press, of expression and of access to information are recognised and guaranteed by the State. Freedom of expression and freedom of access to information shall not prejudice public order, good morals, the protection of the youth and children, the right of every citizen to honour and dignity and protection of personal and family privacy.”*

In practice, significant restrictions on freedom of speech and political space persist. For example, in 2010 Victoire Ingabire returned to Rwanda from exile in The Netherlands to run as a presidential candidate, but she was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Rwandan Supreme Court in a politically motivated judicial proceeding. Her appeal to the African Court on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) cleared her and found that Rwanda violated her rights to freedom of expression as well as to an adequate legal defence. Ingabire finally was released from prison in 2018 by a presidential amnesty after eight years, five of which she spent in solitary confinement. Moreover, while a growing number of social media, television and radio stations broadcast programs expressing critical views of the government, pro-government views still dominate domestic media.

Barriers to International Contact

There are no legal barriers to international communication or contact.

Barriers to Resources

Foreign Funding

There are no legal barriers against foreign funding for NGOs.

Domestic Funding

Currently, NGOs are permitted to engage in income generating activities, provided that any profits earned are used in activities related to their primary objectives. The government is required to include funding for NGOs in the national budget, in addition to normal Ministry-level support and contracts. In practice, however, NGOs receive funds in accordance with government priorities, and NGOs do not have total independence from the government when they receive government funds.

NGOs are permitted to compete for government funds and in some cases encouraged to do so. NGOs are also exempt from tax on most categories of income but the tax law does not provide incentives to donors for donations to NGOs.

Barriers to Assembly

Article 36 of the Constitution guarantees the freedom of assembly as follows:

Freedom of peaceful assembly without arms is guaranteed if it is not inconsistent with the law. Prior authorization shall only be necessary if the law so requires and solely in the case of assembly in the open air, in a public place or on a public road, to the extent that such is necessary in the interests of public safety, public health or public order.

Further, article 2 of Organic Law. N° 10/2013/OL du 11/07/2013 governing Political Organizations and Politicians provides the following definitions:

6° political organization: an association of citizens sharing the same thinking and views on the development of social welfare of all the population and the development of the country, with the objective to accede to power through democratic and peaceful ways, to be able to put them in action;

7° politician: any person carrying out political activities as provided for in item six (6) of this Article, be it individually or through a political organization.

The same Organic Law also requires advance notification of an assembly where it states that:

Article 19: Public meetings: A political organization that wishes to hold a public meeting of its members shall inform the relevant administrative authorities at least five (5) working days before the meeting. Notification modalities must conform to the relevant laws.

Article 20: Demonstrations: A political organization that wishes to hold demonstrations shall inform and seek the authorization of the relevant administrative authorities at least five (5) working days before the event in respect of the provisions of the relevant.

The Penal Code provides for excessive punishments on vague grounds. For example:

Article 685: Penalties for illegal demonstration or public gathering. Any person who holds a public meeting or demonstration on public ways without notifying the competent authority shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of eight (8) days but less than six (6) months and a fine of one hundred thousand (100,000) to one million (1,000,000) Rwandan francs.

If a person holds a public meeting or demonstration on public ways despite refusal by a competent authority, that person shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of six (6) months to one (1) year and a fine of two hundred thousand (200,000) to three million (3,000,000) Rwandan francs or one of these penalties. If a person holds a public meeting or demonstration on public ways without notifying the competent authority and impairs security, order or public health, that person shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of six (6) months to two (2) years and a fine of two million (2,000,000) to five million (5,000,000) Rwandan francs or one of these penalties.

If a person holds a public meeting or demonstration on public ways after refusal by a competent authority and impairs security, order or public health, that person shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of one (1) year to three (3) years and a fine of two million (2,000,000) to five million (5000,000) Rwandan francs.

For more information on restrictions on the freedom of assembly in Rwanda, please see here [“Mission to Rwanda: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association”](#) from September 16, 2014, or find it in the “Reports of UN Special Rapporteurs” section below.

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Reports

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Submission to the Human Rights Committee in advance of the fourth periodic review of Rwanda (Human Rights Watch)
Reports of UN Special Rapporteurs	Mission to Rwanda: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of

	association, Maina Kiai (16 September 2014) Information on 2015 Submission
USIG (United States International Grantmaking) Country Notes	Not available
U.S. State Department	Rwanda Human Rights Report: 2023
Fragile States Index Report	Foreign Policy: Fragile States Index
Human Rights Watch	World Report: Rwanda 2023
IMF Country Reports	Rwanda and the IMF 2014
CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) Country Reports	Not available
International Commission of Jurists	No relevant information available
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library	No information available

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News and Additional Resources

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Key Events

There are no key events to report at this time.

General News

[Kagame opponents and critics say elections in Rwanda neither free nor fair](#) (July 2024)

Paul Kagame's win in Rwanda's presidential election was widely expected, although critics say the vote was neither free nor fair. Kagame faced two opponents — Democratic Green Party Candidate Frank Habineza and independent candidate Philippe Mpayimana. Both received less than 1 percent of the vote. Other candidates, including some of Kagame's most vocal critics, were barred from running for president, including Diane Rwigara.

[Rwanda's president smashes his own election record](#) (July 2024)

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame has smashed his own record by winning Monday's elections with more than 99% of the vote. The 66-year-old won the 2017 election with 98.63% of the vote, higher than the 93% he got in 2010 and the 95% in 2003. His critics say Mr Kagame's thundering majorities come as no surprise as he rules with an iron hand. However, his supporters say they point to his huge popularity, with Rwanda having achieved stability and economic growth under his rule.

Mr Kagame is a former rebel commander whose forces swept to power in 1994, ending a genocide that claimed the lives of around 800,000 people in 100 days.

Civil Society Seeks Clarity on Operating Budget Clause (May 2024)

A clause in a draft law governing NGOs, which proposes that such entities must not exceed 20 per cent of their operating budget in programs that are not in the interest of their beneficiaries, should be clarified to avoid misinterpretation in enforcement, civil society has said. The emphasis on the importance of clarity was highlighted as the lower chamber of Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs started scrutinizing the draft law.

Rwanda Legislature Considers Strict Rules on NGOs (April 2024)

A controversial draft law governing NGOs in Rwanda passed a first reading in parliament, with critics questioning the timing of the bill shortly before elections in July. Opponents warned that the legislation, which has yet to receive final approval, will limit civic space in a country where the government is accused of crushing dissent and press freedoms. The legislation calls for NGOs to submit their operating plans and budgets to the Rwandan authorities for approval.

Justice Minister Calls on Civil Society to Promote Revised Constitution (September 2023)

Minister of Justice Emmanuel Ugirashebuja has urged civil society to disperse the revised constitution as a way of ensuring that it becomes widely known and thoroughly understood at the grassroots level. He made the call on September 5 during his meeting with civil society practitioners on the dissemination and analysis of the newly revised constitution. Ugirashebuja emphasized that for the country to progress, it requires a collective effort from various stakeholders, including civil society.

CSO Grantees Exhibition Showcases Achievements for Rwanda's development agenda (May 2023)

The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) and the Network of International NGOs in Rwanda (NINGO) have organized a CSO grantees exhibition at Kigali Conference and Exhibition Village. The exhibition aimed at showcasing the achievements of grantees of the second phase of the Programme on Strengthening Civil Society Organizations for Responsive and Accountable Governance in Rwanda that started in 2018. The exhibition, which was the last event of the 2023 CSO week, provided an opportunity for civil society organizations (CSOs) to demonstrate their contributions to Rwanda's development agenda.

'Hotel Rwanda' Hero Freed from Prisons (March 2023)

Outspoken Rwandan government critic Paul Rusesabagina, whose efforts to save people during the 1994 genocide inspired the Hollywood film "Hotel Rwanda", has finally been freed from prison after more than 900 days behind bars. Rusesabagina was released away from the media glare and will return to the United States after the Kigali government commuted his 25-year sentence on terrorism charges. His detention had thrown a spotlight on Rwanda's record of crushing political dissent and free speech under President Paul Kagame.

RGB Meets the Network of International NGOs (November 2022)

On November 15, 2022, the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) and the Network of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) operating in Rwanda held a joint meeting during which they discussed how the latter could engage in strategic partnerships for national transformation. In her remarks, RGB CEO, Dr. Usta Kaitesi, underscored that both local and international organisations must continuously improve and create the right influence on one another.

Rwanda criticizes expulsion of its ambassador from Congo (October 2022)

Rwanda accused neighboring Congo of escalating tensions between the two countries after the Rwandan ambassador to Congo was given 48 hours to leave the country following rebel advances in the east. Congo believes that Rwanda is supporting the M23 rebels, who have expanded their control over the past year. In Goma, DRC, residents burned a Rwandan flag during a protest called by civil society there.

Blinken raises concerns on rights in Rwanda during talks with Kagame (August 2022)

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated he voiced “serious concerns” about human rights during talks with Rwandan President Paul Kagame. In particular, he raised the case of “Hotel Rwanda” hero Paul Rusesabagina, a fierce Kagame critic who was sentenced to a 25-year prison term last year on terrorism charges. “As I told President Kagame, we believe people in every country should be able to express their views without fear of intimidation, imprisonment, violence or any other forms of repression,” Blinken told a joint press conference with Rwandan Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta.

Civil Society Open Letter to Commonwealth Heads of Government (June 2022)

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, express our grave concerns about the human rights situation in Rwanda as it prepares to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in June 2022. The silence of the Commonwealth on Rwanda’s human rights record risks undermining the organisation’s human rights mandate, as well as its integrity and credibility. We urge the Commonwealth and its members to consider CHOGM, scheduled to take place in Kigali in the week of 20 June 2022, as a moment to reiterate its core values of human rights, rule of law and good governance.

Rwanda cracking down on YouTubers, bloggers (April 2021)

After clamping down on free speech in traditional media, Rwanda is now arresting and threatening those who have turned to YouTube or blogs to debate current affairs, Human Rights Watch has said. The rights watchdog called on leaders attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June to pressure Rwanda to introduce reforms and protect free speech.

Civil society petitions government over some COVID-19 guidelines (September 2020)

The government has been implementing a series of guidelines to prevent the outbreak since it hit the country in March this year. The last cabinet meeting held on August 26 adopted several stern measures, including strict restrictions on movement, and tasked relevant institutions to implement them. However, civil society organisations have come together to challenge some of the guidelines. The organisations say some instructions lack clarity, are contradictory, and overlap each other, leading to inconsistent interpretation and implementation across the country.

Diane Shima Rwigara is Free (October 2018)

There was pandemonium today in the court room as Prison warders tried to separate excited friends and relatives of freed Diane Shima Rwigara and her mother Adeline Rwigara after the High Court ruling granting the duo bail. Diane and her mother have been unlawfully detained by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda as a result of her criticism of his government. They were arrested along with over a dozen persons after Diane declared intention to run for the post of presidency against Paul Kagame. Diane and her mother have spent over a year in detention and were charged for treason, facing over 20 years in prison if found guilty.

Rwandan Opposition Leader, 2,100 Others Walk Free from Prison (September 2018)

One of Rwanda’s most prominent opposition leaders walked free Saturday after the government approved the early release of more than 2,100 prisoners with little explanation. Supporters of Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza and the state-run The New Times newspaper posted photos of the opposition leader walking out of Nyarugenge prison hours after the justice ministry’s announcement. Also approved for early release was musician Kizito Mihigo, who along with Ingabire received a presidential commutation. The ministry statement said both had made their most recent requests for clemency in June. Ingabire, head of the FDU-Inkingi opposition party, was arrested in 2010 and found guilty of conspiracy to undermine the government and denying Rwanda’s 1994 genocide, charges that she denied. She was sentenced to 15 years.

Rwandan parliament passes law to regulate churches (July 2018)

The Rwandan parliament passed new legislation aimed to regulate faith-based organizations. The new law requires pastors to have a theology degree before they can start their own churches. It also requires faith-based organizations to declare grants to the regulator, Rwanda Governance Board. Under the new law, any financial support to a faith-based organization must be channeled through the organization’s account in a bank or a financial institution in Rwanda.

Human Rights Commission given more responsibilities (January 2018)

The National Human Rights Commission has been given more responsibilities and power to access any place where torture against a person is assumed, under the draft law approved by cabinet. The Chairperson and Spokesperson of Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) told Sunday Times that having some torture cases or death cases reported by international entities represent weakness of local entities, or false reports based on individuals' interest. He said the Human Rights Commission should not work alone, rather with the civil society which alongside the community to understand their concerns, so as to give information on probable torture incidences for prevention purposes.

International organisations urged to align activities with districts (September 2017)

International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) working in Rwanda have been challenged to ensure their partnerships generate greater achievement in services aiming at socio-economic transformation of citizens. The Chief Executive of the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), Prof. Anastase Shyaka, made the call during the RGB's first meeting with INGOs under its new mandate of registering and monitoring their operations. The meeting aimed at enhancing partnership and welcoming INGOs into the new operational framework.

Rwandan police arrest Paul Kagame critic Diane Rwigara (August 2017)

Rwandan police have arrested Diane Rwigara, a leading critic of President Paul Kagame, for alleged offences against state security. Rwigara's mother and sister were also detained on tax evasion charges, while she is also being charged with forgery, police said in a Twitter post. The three women can be held for up to five days while authorities decide whether to press charges.

Paul Kagame re-elected president with 99% of vote in Rwanda election (August 2017)

Paul Kagame, the controversial president of Rwanda, has won a landslide victory in the small African state's election, securing a third term in office and extending his 17 years in power. The result will surprise no one, inside or outside Rwanda. In the final tally for Friday's election, he won almost 99% of votes cast, said Kalisa Mbanda, chairman of the National Electoral Commission.

Rwanda's exiled activist's wife charged with treason (March 2017)

The Rwandan-British wife of a member of the Rwandese opposition in exile appeared Thursday in a court in Kigali, accused of "forming an illegal armed group". Violette Uwamahoro rejected all charges against her at the hearing which will decide whether she should remain in custody until the start of her trial at an undetermined date. According to her lawyer, Mrs. Uwamahoro was accused of having asked Mr. Shumbusho, a policeman in Kigali, via the WhatsApp messenger, to reveal "information about state security" and to ask him "to go to Uganda to form an armed group to attack Rwanda". "It's a lie," insisted Mrs. Uwamahoro after the charges were read. "Yes, we used to chat but I never talked to her about anything related to national security. We were only discussing family stories," she maintained.

Launch of Rwanda Media Barometer 2016 (November 2016)

The second edition of the Rwanda Media Barometer shows an upward trend in Rwanda's media development from 60.7% in 2013 to 69.6 in 2016. Dr Christophe Kayumba, the head of the team that was commissioned to conduct the study, attributes the improved score to media reforms undertaken by the Government of Rwanda since 2012.

Rwanda Parliament denounces claims by the EU (October 2016)

Rwanda's Parliament has denounced claims by the European Union (EU) that the government denies Victoire Ingabire her rights and freedoms. Ingabire is serving a 15-year prison sentence for negationism and revisionism of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi on top of conspiracy and terrorism. Between September 19-22, a delegation of EU MPs visited their Rwandan counterparts to share best practices on the rights of women and gender equality. However, when some of the EU MPs attempted to visit Ingabire in prison, they were denied access. After returning home, the EU MPs wrote in a report on their visit complaining about Rwanda's recent constitutional amendment, lack of political space, media freedom and being blocked from accessing Ingabire in prison.

Rwanda Required to Appear At Ingabire Court Case in Arusha (June 2016)

The Rwandan government is expected to appear at the African Court of Human and Peoples Rights,

despite requesting to withdraw from the court's special declaration that allows individuals and NGOs to sue governments. Pending cases that involve the government of Rwanda include that of Kayumba Nyamwasa, a former chief of staff of the Rwandan army – now in exile – who, alongside “others,” took the government to court for allegedly declaring their passports “invalid” without notice. Rwandan national Laurent Munyandikirwa has also taken the government to the court for allegedly ousting him illegally from a local human rights body.

Civil society calls for tough measures (May 2016)

The Civil Society Platform has called for tough measures against persons found to have mismanaged public funds as per the latest released Auditor-General's report. The umbrella body for civil society organisations operating in the country said the move to hold accountable individuals who engage in fraud will improve public funds management.

Civil society commits to fight Genocide ideology (May 2016)

Over 3,000 people from 400 organisations under Rwanda Civil Society Platform gathered at Amahoro Stadium to commemorate the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi which claimed over a million lives, including more than 100 employees of the Platform. Eduard Munyamariza, chairperson of Rwanda Civil Society Platform, said it was time the civil society fulfilled their responsibilities and partnered with the government to build a peaceful country.

Govt, civil society in joint regional integration drive (March 2016)

Government and civil society officials have agreed to organise regular platforms where the Ministry of East African Community Affairs and civil society groups can meet to enhance a people-centered regional integration approach. This was recommended, yesterday, during the first such gathering in Kigali. The consultative forum, themed: “Engagement of the Rwandan civil society in the East African Community integration”, intended to, among others, introduce the local civil society fraternity to the EAC integration agenda and identify areas that require further awareness.

Jailed Rwandan opposition leader in plea to Arusha court (February 2016)

The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights will 3 hear a plea filed by Rwandan opposition leader Victoire Ingabire, who has accused the government of violating her freedoms and denying her a fair trial. Ingabire, 47, is currently serving a 15-year in jail sentence handed to her by the Supreme Court in 2013, which found her guilty of inciting revolt, forming armed groups to destabilise the country, as well as denying the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. It is not yet known whether the government will allow Ms Ingabire to travel to Arusha for the hearing, or whether she will be represented by her lawyers.

U.S. Reiterates Criticism of Kagame Bid to Extend Presidency (January 2016)

The U.S. reiterated its criticism of Rwandan President Paul Kagame's plan to extend his 15-year rule in elections, while saying it will continue to deepen commercial ties with the East African nation. “We believe that respecting established term limits can strengthen democratic institutions and help build a vibrant and free society,” U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker said in a statement issued during a visit to Rwanda. Pritzker met Kagame to discuss opportunities presented by the integration of the five-nation East African Community.

Statement by NSC Spokesperson on Rwandan Constitutional Referendum (December 2015)

The United States is disappointed that a referendum was called on short notice to amend the Rwandan constitution and introduce exceptions to term limits. While we commend the people of Rwanda for peacefully exercising their civic rights, we regret that the arrangements for the referendum failed to provide sufficient time and opportunity for political debate on the merits of the proposed provisions.

Cabinet asks President Kagame to call a referendum on Constitution (November 2015)

Members of the Cabinet yesterday asked President Paul Kagame to call a referendum for Rwandans to approve the recently revised Constitution of the country. The decision was reached during an Extraordinary Cabinet Meeting chaired by Prime Minister Anastase Murekezi, which was held at Village Urugwiro.

Rwandan Senate votes to allow third term for Kagame (November 2015)

Rwanda's upper house of parliament has unanimously approved a constitutional amendment to allow President Paul Kagame to seek a third term. The vote by the Senate clears the path for a referendum that is not expected to face much opposition. Earlier this year, more than 60 percent of voters signed a petition calling for constitutional changes to be drafted that would allow Kagame to stand again.

Parliament passes new constitutional amendments (October 2015)

The Lower House of Parliament unanimously voted to reduce presidential term limits from seven to five years renewable once. The change will be preceded by one transitional presidential term of seven years for which any presidential candidates including President Paul Kagame, should he choose to run, will be eligible.

New Project to Strengthen Role of Civil Society (September 2015)

A project aimed at strengthening the role of civil society organisations in monitoring and accountability in service delivery in different communities has been launched. The project, named "Efficiency, Accountability and Service Delivery (EASD-R)", was announced during a meeting that brought together the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) and development partners. The four-year project is expected to empower communities to voice their concerns.

Rwandan Opposition Party Seeks to Block Third Term (June 2015)

Rwanda's Green Party, the country's tiny but main opposition, said it was challenging moves to change the constitution to allow President Paul Kagame to stand for a third consecutive term in elections in 2017.

Civil Society Organizations are Agents of Change (December 2014)

The Rwanda governance Board (RGB), in collaboration with One UN, awarded grants to eight local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on Thursday December 11, 2014, under the joint program of "Strengthening Civil Society Organizations for responsive and accountable governance in Rwanda." Each organization received an amount of US\$30,000, and the funds will enable them to implement their different projects contributing to efforts of strengthening responsive and accountable governance in Rwanda. Speaking at the ceremony, the One UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Lamin Manneh reiterated his institution's commitment to support CSOs aimed at building sustainable development. "We know that any society can't develop without the role of civil society. We are strongly committed to make this programme as successful as possible by supporting grantees to use the received funds to improve the living conditions of the people of Rwanda," said Mr Manneh.

Ntaganda Released from Mpanga prison (June 2014)

Bernard Ntaganda was released from Mpanga prison in Nyanza after serving a four-year sentence after he had been found guilty of endangering national security, divisionism, inciting ethnic divisions and attempting to organize demonstrations without official authorization. The director of Mpanga prison, Alexis Sano, refuted claims that Ntaganda was mistreated while in prison and added that he wasn't denied any of his rights. Ntaganda has vowed to continue with politics.

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