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Rwanda: Run-up to presidential elections marred by threats and harassment

Amnesty International strongly condemns the growing number of incidents of politically motivated threats and intimidation of individuals and local communities in the run-up to the presidential elections of 25 August.

"The Rwandese government has stage-managed the first post-genocide elections in a climate of fear and intimidation. How can the Rwandese people freely exercise their fundamental political freedoms when individuals are being arrested simply because they would not attend campaign rallies of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party?," Amnesty International asked.

"These acts of undue political pressure, violence and intimidation against political opponents must stop immediately," Amnesty International urged.

The RPF has used pressure tactics including the detention of opposition supporters, forced conscription into RPF party ranks, and violent intimidation, including death threats, to undermine support for the opposition. The RPF candidate, current president Paul Kagame, has been running a campaign whose central message in recent days has been the denunciation of the other candidates' "ethnic divisiveness".

The primary opposition candidate and former Prime Minister, Faustin Twagiramungu has faced numerous obstacles during his campaign. He was forced to interrupt his campaign for several days this week in response to death threats made against his driver and personal assistant by Rwandese state security officers. He has also faced logistical obstacles: the police seized his campaigning leaflets on the basis that they were intended to sow ethnic division, and the government has impeded the candidate from booking venues for campaign events across the country.

The government has been harassing individuals who signed their names to the official list endorsing Mr. Twagiramungu's candidacy.

Suspected opposition supporters have also reportedly been detained and then released on the condition that they renounce their affiliation with opposition parties and display RPF insignia. The pro-government media has been running a smear campaign against Mr. Twagiramungu.

Mr. Twagiramungu is running as an independent, as his former party, the *Mouvement Démocratique Républicain*, (Democratic Republican Movement, MDR), was banned earlier in the year. The government denied legal status to the newly formed political group that supports him, ADEP-Mizero, seen as the successor to the MDR party, on the basis that it was receiving foreign funding and was not in line with the Constitution. ADEP-Mizero leadership is being called daily to the police station for questioning, in a move that is perceived as a Rwandese government stratagem to prevent them from campaigning for Mr. Twagiramungu. Two party leaders, Célestin Kabanda and Jean Minani have reportedly had their passports seized in recent days. Léonard Kavutse, a former member of Parliament with the MDR and a founder of ADEP-Mizero, has been held at Gikondo police station in the capital, Kigali, since 19 August.

The other two political candidates, Jean-Nepomuscene Nayinzira, an independent, and Mrs. Alivera Mukabaramba of the Party for Progress and Concord, have not been spared the logistical hurdles and intimidation. Only the RPF has been able to take advantage of free television airtime to broadcast their messages.

"Acts of political violence and harassment often go unreported as long experience has taught victims that those responsible will inevitably remain free to take reprisals," Amnesty International said.

Background

The 25 August elections mark the first presidential elections since the 1994 genocide, since which time the RPF has held power.

The law on political parties was promulgated on 27 June this year, after which would-be political parties rapidly submitted their applications to become legitimate parties, in order to field candidates for the presidential campaign period that began on 1 August. The law on political parties forbids parties from organizing at the local level, though the RPF exercises considerable control at the local level.

Public Document

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