

World Report 2025 - Rwanda

The July presidential elections, which President Paul Kagame won with 99.15 percent of the vote, took place against a [backdrop of repression](#). Allegations of ill-treatment of detainees continued, and in April, several prison officials and prisoners were convicted of murder and assault of prisoners at Rubavu prison. In May, Rwandan authorities denied entry to a senior researcher from Human Rights Watch.

Rwanda provided operational and logistical support to the M23 armed group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where its troops carried out indiscriminate shelling on civilian areas and displacement camps. In July, the United Kingdom's newly-elected government scrapped a [controversial plan by its predecessor](#) to send asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Justice for the 1994 Genocide

Thirty years after the 1994 genocide, that left more than half a million dead, efforts to deliver justice for the killings and ensure that those responsible are brought to account continue worldwide. Several individuals responsible for the genocide, including former high-level government officials and other key figures behind the massacres, have been brought to justice, and more prosecutions of genocide suspects [are being conducted](#) in domestic courts across Europe under the principle of universal jurisdiction, including over a dozen in France and Belgium. In January 2024, a 69-year-old Rwandan man was [arrested](#) in Gateshead, in the north of England, by police investigating genocide and crimes against humanity. He was released on bail.

Rwandan judicial authorities continued to investigate and prosecute genocide cases, including against individuals extradited from other countries. In January 2024, Wenceslas Twagirayezu, a Rwandan with Danish citizenship who was extradited to Rwanda in December 2018, [was acquitted](#) of genocide and crimes against humanity during the 1994 genocide. Twagirayezu's acquittal followed contradictory witness statements and evidence which demonstrated that he was not in Rwanda at the time of the events he was accused of having been involved in. A court of appeal [convicted him](#) and handed him a 20-year sentence in July.

To mark the 30 years since the genocide, Human Rights Watch [released a series of archives](#) highlighting the extraordinary efforts of human rights defenders in Rwanda and abroad, to warn about the planned 1994 genocide and attempt to stop the killings.

Freedom of Association

In August, authorities [shut down](#) thousands of churches and prayer houses accused of failing to comply with health and safety regulations. By the end of August, more than 14,000 places of worship were reportedly [inspected](#) across the country, and over 8,000 closed for violations, according to Local Government Ministry figures. On August 28, authorities issued a [ban on the activities](#) of 43 religious groups accused of operating illegally.

In May, Rwandan immigration authorities denied entry to [Clémentine de Montjoye](#), a senior researcher in the Africa division at Human Rights Watch, upon arrival at Kigali International Airport. De Montjoye traveled to Rwanda for meetings with foreign diplomatic officials but was told upon arrival that she was “not welcome in Rwanda” for undisclosed “immigration reasons,” and Kenya Airways was instructed to ensure her removal from the country.

A [draft bill](#) that could place strict limits on the operations and activities of civil society was reviewed by parliament in April.

Politicized Judiciary

The authorities’ crackdown on the opposition, media, and civil society persisted ahead of general elections which took place on July 15, 2024. Rwandans were not able to freely express their views and exercise their vote fairly and peacefully.

At least fourteen members of the unregistered Dalfa-Umurinzi opposition party and four journalists and critics are behind bars. Some spent more than three years in pretrial detention – and others have been convicted of offenses incompatible with international human rights norms. The trial of a group arrested in October 2021 for [following an online training and planning a campaign](#) on peaceful methods for expressing dissent began in October.

In March 2024, human rights defender François-Xavier Byuma was released from prison after [serving a 17-year sentence](#) following a gacaca trial – carried out by community-based courts – marred by grave procedural errors. The trial judge was known to have a prior conflict with Byuma but had refused to recuse himself, as the law required and Byuma requested. Byuma, then the head of an association for the defense of children’s rights, had previously investigated allegations that the judge had raped a minor. The judge also failed to accord Byuma the right to defend himself fully.

Torture

Serious human rights abuses, including torture, are pervasive in many of Rwanda’s detention facilities.

In November, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) deferred the re-accreditation of Rwanda’s National Commission for Human Rights, citing concerns over its failure to recognize serious human rights violations, including torture, and publicly report on them. Human Rights Watch’s [analysis](#) concluded that the NCHR’s work does not comply fully with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (The Paris Principles), and that the institution does not fulfil its role as Rwanda’s National Preventive Mechanism on torture.

On April 5, the Rubavu High Court, in the country’s Western Province, convicted Innocent Kayumba, a former director of Rubavu and Nyarugenge prisons, of the assault and murder of a detainee at Rubavu prison in 2019, and handed him a 15-year sentence and 5 million Rwanda Francs fine (about US\$ 3,700). Two other Rwanda Correctional Service (RCS) officers and seven prisoners, who were accused of acting under instruction, were convicted of beating and killing

prisoners. Three senior RCS officials, including former Director Ephrem Gahungu and Deputy Director Augustin Uwayezu, were acquitted.

In January, Dieudonné Niyonsenga, a journalist serving a seven-year sentence at Nyarugenge prison, told a Kigali court that he was detained in a “hole” that often fills with water, without access to light, and is beaten frequently. He said his hearing and eyesight were impaired due to his three-year long detention in “inhuman” conditions and beatings, according to court transcripts and [the Voice of America’s reporting](#).

Support to the M23 Armed Group

Throughout the first half of 2024, the Rwandan military and the M23 armed group it supports gained ground closer to Goma, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and surrounded the city and displacement camps hosting over half a million people who have had to flee their homes. All parties to the conflict have increasingly carried out apparent violations of the laws of war.

Human Rights Watch documented five apparently unlawful attacks by Rwandan forces and the M23 since January in which artillery or rocket fire struck displacement camps or populated areas near Goma. On May 3, Rwandan or M23 forces launched at least three rockets into displacement camps around Goma, killing at least 17 civilians, including 15 children. The Congolese army placed artillery positions and other military objectives close to the camps, putting civilians at unnecessary risk. M23 fighters also raped women and girls crossing into their territory to look for food.

The European Union and the United States have imposed [sanctions](#) on leaders of abusive armed groups in eastern Congo, including the M23, and on several Rwandan officials responsible for supporting abusive armed groups. In July, the [EU sanctioned](#) Col. Augustin Migabo of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) for his role in supporting the M23 armed group. In November, the EU granted a second tranche of financial support to the RDF for their deployment in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado province, despite concerns over the lack of sufficient safeguards around the disbursement of the first support package. The UK did not call on Rwanda to end its assistance to the M23 and has not sanctioned responsible individuals.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Rwanda does not criminalize consensual same-sex conduct or non-normative gender expression. However, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people could be arrested under article 143 of the penal code, which punishes “public indecency” with imprisonment ranging from six months to two years. On April 26, the Supreme Court [dismissed](#) a petition challenging this provision.