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HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

Rwanda: Opposition Leader Arrested

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Joins Colleagues Held for 3-Years

(Nairobi) – The [Rwandan](#) authorities rearrested Victoire Ingabire, the head of an unregistered political party, on June 19, 2025, as a part of a drawn-out trial that targets political opposition figures, Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities should release Ingabire and other people detained on politically motivated grounds and guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Ingabire was arrested at her home in the capital, Kigali. A [tweet](#) by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau said that the Public Prosecutor's Office requested her to be arrested in connection with the ongoing trial of members of her party. It said she is being prosecuted for forming a criminal group and planning activities aimed at inciting public disorder.

"Ingabire's arrest and this trial are only the most recent example of the dangers of political opposition in Rwanda," said [Lewis Mudge](#), Central Africa Director at Human Rights Watch. "The prosecuting authorities' message is clearly that if you dare to seek political office outside of the ruling party, you risk imprisonment."

Ingabire previously spent [nearly eight years](#) in prison, from 2010 to 2018, following a politically motivated trial. In 2012, Ingabire was sentenced to 15 years for conspiracy to undermine the established government and denying the country's [1994 genocide](#) after she sought to contest the 2010 presidential elections. She was pardoned and released in September 2018. In March 2024, a Kigali court rejected Ingabire's [request to expunge](#)

her criminal record and allow her to run in the July 2024 presidential election. President Paul Kagame won with over 99 percent of the vote.

Ingabire, having previously been the president of the unregistered opposition party United Democratic Forces (Forces Démocratiques Unifiées or FDU-Inkingi), created another party – the Development and Liberty for All (Développement et Liberté pour tous or Dalfa-Umurinzi) – in November 2019. Rwandan authorities have refused to register the party or allow it to take part in elections and have repeatedly arrested, jailed, and harassed its members. Since 2017, five members of these parties have died or disappeared in suspicious circumstances.

In October 2021, seven members of Dalfa-Umurinzi were arrested. Sylvain Sibomana, Alexis Rucubanganya, Hamad Hagenimana, Jean-Claude Ndayishimiye, Alphonse Mutabazi, Marcel Nahimana, and Emmanuel Masengesho were all detained in the days leading up to and following the party's declared "Ingabire day," scheduled for October 14. On that day, Ingabire was planning to speak about political repression in Rwanda, including suspicious deaths, killings, disappearances, and abusive prosecutions.

The party members have been held in pretrial detention ever since, though their trial only began in late 2024. Sibomana had previously spent nearly eight years in custody, from 2013 to early 2021. Human Rights Watch has monitored previous trials of these and other opposition members, during which the accused told the court that interrogators had tortured them to coerce confessions.

Théoneste Nsengimana, a journalist who planned to cover Ingabire day, is also being held and tried with the party members. Two other people, Claudine Uwimana and Josiane Ingabire (no relation to Victoire) were also included in the case, with Josiane Ingabire being tried in absentia.

The prosecution bases its accusations, such as conspiracy to incite insurrection, on the group's acquisition of a book, "Blueprint for Revolution," written by Srdja Popovic, and participation in a training session organized by the author's organization, the Center for Applied Non-Violent Actions and Strategies, or CANVAS. The book and training focus on peaceful strategies to resist authoritarianism, such as nonviolent protest, noncooperation, boycott, and mobilization. The prosecution is using the contents of the book and training, including the use of Jitsi—an encrypted online communication platform—and the use of pseudonyms during the training, as evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

The charges include "spreading false information or harmful propaganda with intent to cause a hostile international opinion against the Rwandan government" and "formation of or joining a criminal association."

On June 17, the court summoned Ingabire to appear on June 19 because she had been cited during the trial. After she was questioned in court about the accused and their statements, the three-judge panel, allegedly unsatisfied, ordered the prosecutor to investigate Ingabire directly and ordered for her to be detained.

Social protests and mobilizations offer people the opportunity to communicate legitimate complaints and grievances to the authorities in a nonviolent way. Governments have a responsibility to create a safe and enabling environment for individuals and groups to exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, of expression, and of association, Human Rights Watch said.

The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front tightly controls the country's political space through a combination of legal restrictions, surveillance, and intimidation of [opposition figures](#) and independent voices. Critics often face harassment, imprisonment, or exile. In recent years some political detainees have [died](#) in unclear circumstances. Civil society and media operate under [heavy constraints](#), with red lines around criticism of the government or security forces or straying from official talking points about the genocide.

Ingabire's rearrest comes as Rwanda faces heightened international scrutiny over [military support](#) to the M23 rebel group in eastern Congo, accusations that have led to suspended Western aid and sanctions by the [United States](#) and [European Union](#).

"It is beyond troubling that Rwandan authorities consider a training on how to peacefully resist authoritarianism as the formation of a criminal group and fomenting unrest," Mudge said. "Instead of detaining the opposition members and putting them on trial, the government should open the country's democratic space to much needed political discourse."

Associated documents

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Rwanda

Kingali: Head of an unregistered oppositional political party, Victoire Ingabire, rearrested

[Rwanda : Arrestation d'une dirigeante de l'opposition](#) (Appeal or News Release, French)

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