



**Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of
Rwanda
51st Session
Human Rights Watch**

July 2025

Introduction

1. Human Rights Watch submits the following information regarding Rwanda's human rights record since its 2021 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), including efforts towards implementation of UPR recommendations as well as developments in the human rights situation since then.¹ This submission is not a complete review of all recommendations supported by Rwanda, nor a comprehensive review of Rwanda's protection of human rights.
2. In 2021, the Rwandan delegation expressed support for 160 out of 284 recommendations, including relating to access to justice and remedy, prison and detention conditions, and the rights to freedom of speech and association.²
3. However, there has been little to no progress in these areas considering the persistence of severe abuses over the reporting period.
4. In Rwanda, independent media, opposition parties, and civil society members remain unable to operate freely. Suspicious deaths and disappearances of real or perceived critics have gone unpunished while both the judiciary and the national human rights commission continue to lack independence.³ Detainees are held in official and unofficial detention centers, where they were subjected to ill-treatment and torture during the reporting period, although a landmark trial of prison officials raised hope for accountability.⁴
5. Rwandan authorities have also been implicated in serious abuses outside of Rwanda's borders. The government has provided military, logistical, and other support to the abusive M23 armed group in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, where Rwandan forces have carried out serious violations of international humanitarian law, including apparent war crimes.⁵ Rwandan authorities have also engaged in transnational repression, using a wide array of tactics to target critics of the government, real or perceived, abroad.⁶
6. In May 2024, Rwandan immigration authorities denied entry to Clémentine de Montjoye, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, upon arrival at Kigali International Airport, as she traveled to Rwanda for meetings with diplomats. De Montjoye is the fourth Human

¹ Additional information on the human rights situation in Rwanda can be found at: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/rwanda>.

² Human Rights Council, *Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14/Add.1 (May 20, 2021), para. 1, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/14/Add.1>; Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14/ (March 25, 2021), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/14>.

³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), Rwanda Chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/rwanda>; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2024), Rwanda Chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/rwanda>.

⁴ "Rwanda: Torture, Ill-Treatment in Detention," Human Rights Watch news release, October 15, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/15/rwanda-torture-ill-treatment-detention>.

⁵ "DR Congo: M23 Armed Group Forcibly Transferring Civilians," Human Rights Watch report, June 18, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/18/dr-congo-m23-armed-group-forcibly-transferring-civilians>; "DR Congo: Rwandan Forces, M23 Rebels Shell Civilians," Human Rights Watch report, September 26, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/26/dr-congo-rwandan-forces-m23-rebels-shell-civilians>.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, *'Join Us or Die': Rwanda's Extraterritorial Repression* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Rights Watch researcher to be blocked from entering Rwanda since 2008.⁷

7. Efforts to deliver justice for the 1994 genocide continue more than 30 years later. Rwandan judicial authorities continued to investigate and prosecute genocide cases while more prosecutions of genocide suspects are being conducted under the principle of universal jurisdiction in Europe.⁸

Freedom of Association and Expression

8. During the 2021 UPR, Rwandan authorities supported 13 recommendations on freedom of expression and access to information, including on the need to create an enabling and safe environment for journalists and activists, and on repealing provisions restricting free speech.⁹ It noted another 13, including some explicitly calling for the protection of journalists and activists.¹⁰ The government failed to implement the accepted recommendations.
9. After years of threats, intimidation, suspicious deaths or disappearances, and high-profile prosecutions, few independent opposition parties or journalists remain active in Rwanda. During the reporting period, the authorities have misused the judiciary to silence critics, abusively bringing charges of “spreading false information or harmful propaganda with intent to cause a hostile international opinion against [the] Rwandan Government” against the political opposition or independent media challenging official narratives.¹¹ This criminal offense is incompatible with Rwanda’s regional and international human rights obligations.

Political Space and Elections

10. In July 2024, President Paul Kagame won his fourth term as president with 99 percent of the vote,¹² further consolidating the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front’s (RPF) political power. Like in 2017, when Kagame also won by a landslide,¹³ authorities cracked down on media and civil society ahead of the poll while other political parties faced obstacles in contesting the elections.¹⁴
11. The electoral commission barred Diane Rwigara, the leader of the People Salvation Movement, from running in the election, alleging that she had not submitted the correct

⁷ “Rwanda: Human Rights Watch Researcher Barred,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 16, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/rwanda-human-rights-watch-researcher-barred>.

⁸ “Rwanda: Genocide Archives Released,” Human Rights Watch report, April 2, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/02/rwanda-genocide-archives-released>.

⁹ Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14 (March 25, 2021), recommendations 134.49 to 134.62.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, recommendations 135.41 and 136.29 to 136.44.

¹¹ Examples where the prosecution brought such charges against critics are provided in this submission. See for instance page 4.

¹² Shweta Sharma, “Paul Kagame set to win flawed Rwanda election with 99% of vote,” *The Independent*, July 16, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/rwanda-election-results-paul-kagame-b2580446.html>.

¹³ “Rwanda: Politically Closed Elections,” Human Rights Watch report, August 18, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/18/rwanda-politically-closed-elections>

¹⁴ “Rwanda: Respect Rights During Elections,” Human Rights Watch news release, June 14, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/14/rwanda-respect-rights-during-elections>.

documentation to support her candidacy.¹⁵ Victoire Ingabire's unregistered Development and Liberty for All opposition party (also known as Dalfa-Umurinzi) was prevented from contesting the 2024 elections.¹⁶

12. At least 15 members of the Dalfa-Umurinzi party, which has faced continued judicial harassment and abuses for years, are currently behind bars, including Ingabire. Among them are 7 who were arrested in October 2021 in relation to "Ingabire Day," an event scheduled for the same month, and organized by the party to discuss, among other things, political repression in Rwanda.¹⁷ Their trial started in late 2024. The prosecution based its accusations on the group's attempt to follow an online training and plan a campaign on peaceful methods of dissent and brought state security charges against them.¹⁸ The authorities arrested Ingabire in June 2025 in relation to the trial.¹⁹
13. On December 16, 2022, a court sentenced Dalfa-Umurinzi member Théophile Ntirutwa to seven years in prison for "spreading false information" following his arrest on May 11, 2020.²⁰ Ntirutwa was convicted based on phone calls he made to Ingabire in which he said that an incident at his shop was an assassination attempt by security forces against him. Even if the allegations were untrue, his conviction and harsh sentence violate human rights law. Sharing false information does not alone constitute legitimate grounds to criminalize freedom of expression. United Nations experts sent a letter to the Rwandan authorities to share their concerns on this case in April 2024.²¹
14. Since 2017, five members of the Dalfa-Umurinzi party have died or disappeared in suspicious circumstances.²²
15. In September 2021, Christopher Kayumba was arrested shortly after establishing a new political party, the Rwandese Platform for Democracy (RPD).²³ He was later acquitted of rape and "sexual misconduct" charges and released in February 2023. However, in November 2023, Kayumba was convicted on appeal and given a two-year suspended sentence. Kayumba previously claimed that government officials had threatened to "destroy" him criminally if he did not cease his political activities. He also denounced the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid; "Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions," Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/16/rwanda-wave-free-speech-prosecutions>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Rwanda: Opposition Leader Arrested," Human Rights Watch news release, June 24, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/24/rwanda-opposition-leader-arrested>.

²⁰ "Politician Convicted for Harming Rwanda's Image," Human Rights Watch news release, January 18, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/18/politician-convicted-harming-rwandas-image>.

²¹ "Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," Letter, Ref.: AL RWA 1/2024, April 3, 2024, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28841>.

²² "Rwanda: Respect Rights During Elections," Human Rights Watch news release, June 14, 2024; Human Rights Watch World Report: *Rwanda, Events of 2020*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/rwanda>; Lewis Mudge, "Another Mysterious Opposition Death in Rwanda," Human Rights Watch dispatch, March 12, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/12/another-mysterious-opposition-death-rwanda>.

²³ "Rwanda: Respect Rights During Elections," Human Rights Watch news release, June 14, 2024.

existence of “safe houses,”²⁴ where detainees are routinely held illegally and tortured.²⁵

Media

16. Rwanda failed to implement the recommendations relating to media freedom they had accepted, including to strengthening media pluralism and independent media.²⁶ While some private radio stations and YouTube commentators occasionally broadcast programs addressing politically sensitive issues,²⁷ pro-government views dominate the national media landscape. During the reporting period, journalists and YouTube commentators have been unjustly prosecuted. Additionally, the prominent investigative journalist John Williams Ntwali died in suspicious circumstances.²⁸
17. YouTube journalist Dieudonné Niyonsenga, also known as “Cyuma Hassan,” was arrested in April 2020 and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment, after reporting on the impact of the Covid-19 guidelines on vulnerable populations. He was acquitted and released in March 2021, but the prosecution appealed the verdict and Niyonsenga was rearrested in November 2021 and is still in prison.²⁹ In January 2024, he told a Kigali court that he was detained in a “hole” that often fills with water, without access to light, and that he was beaten frequently.³⁰ He said his hearing and eyesight have been impaired due to his detention in “inhuman” conditions and beatings.³¹
18. Journalist Théoneste Nsengimana was arrested in October 2021 as part of the broader crackdown against the Dalfa-Umurinzi party, after his channel announced its intention to cover “Ingabire Day.”³² He has been tried with members of the party³³ and is currently behind bars. Nsengimana’s YouTube channel had hosted sensitive discussions on current affairs in Rwanda in the past. UN experts sent a letter to the Rwandan authorities to

²⁴ Human Rights Watch has documented the existence of such “safe houses.” See Human Rights Watch, *‘We Will Force You To Confess’: Torture and Unlawful Military Detention in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2017), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/rwanda1017_web2_0.pdf

²⁵ Ibid; Human Rights Watch World Report: *Rwanda, Events of 2023*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/rwanda>.

²⁶ Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14 (March 25, 2021), recommendations 134.50 and 134.51.

²⁷ “Rwanda: Arrests, Prosecutions over YouTube Posts,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 30, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/30/rwanda-arrests-prosecutions-over-youtube-posts>.

²⁸ “Rwanda: End Abuses Against Journalists,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/18/rwanda-end-abuses-against-journalists>; “Rwanda: Ensure Independent Investigation into John Williams Ntwali’s Death,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 31, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/31/rwanda-ensure-independent-investigation-john-williams-ntwalis-death>; “Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2022; “Rwanda: Arrests, Prosecutions over YouTube Posts,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 30, 2021.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2022* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2022), Rwanda chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/rwanda>.

³⁰ “Rwanda: End Abuses Against Journalists,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 18, 2024.

³¹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), Rwanda chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/rwanda>.

³² “Rwanda: Crackdown on Opposition, Media Intensifies,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/19/rwanda-crackdown-opposition-media-intensifies>.

³³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2024), Rwanda chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/rwanda>.

share their concerns on both Niyonsenga and Nsengimana cases in April 2024.³⁴

19. On May 31, 2021, the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) announced the arrest of YouTube commentator Aimable Karasira for offenses under Rwanda's genocide ideology law.³⁵ His arrest followed comments he made on his YouTube channel challenging the official narratives of events surrounding the 1994 genocide.³⁶ He is currently in jail while his trial is ongoing. Rwandan laws on genocide ideology, which may have been intended to prevent and punish hate speech of the kind that led to the 1994 genocide, have restricted free speech and imposed strict limits on how people can talk about the genocide and other events of 1994.³⁷
20. Yvonne Idamange, a Tutsi online commentator and genocide survivor who criticized the Covid-19 lockdown and the government-organized genocide commemorations, was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison on September 30, 2021.³⁸ The prosecution had categorized Idamange's criticism of the monetization of memorial sites and accusations that genocide survivors are "ignored" as "desecration of a memorial site" and "genocide minimization."³⁹ The severity of the charges brought against her, the opaque nature of her trial, and the disproportionately harsh sentence appear designed to intimidate anyone thinking of expressing critical views on the government's response to the genocide.

Transnational repression

21. Rwandan authorities and their proxies have deployed a wide array of tactics to target real or perceived critics abroad, including asylum seekers and refugees.⁴⁰
22. Human Rights Watch documented five cases of suspicious killings that took place since 2021 in Uganda, Mozambique, and South Africa, with many of the victims being outspoken critics of the Rwandan government.⁴¹ Human Rights Watch also documented cases of kidnappings, attempted kidnappings, physical assaults, and beatings of Rwandan refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda by Kinyarwanda speakers or people suspected of working for the Rwandan government. In some cases, the victims were told they would be handed over to Rwanda or were accused of working against the Rwandan government.⁴²

³⁴ "Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," Letter, Ref.: AL RWA 1/2024, April 3, 2024.

³⁵ During Rwanda's 2021 UPR, Rwanda noted the following recommendation: "Amend article 96 of the Penal Code regarding incitement to genocide to bring it into line with international standards on freedom of expression." Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14 (March 25, 2021), recommendation 135.40; "Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions," Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2022.

³⁶ Ibid; "Rwanda: Crackdown on Opposition, Media Intensifies," Human Rights Watch news release, October 19, 2021.

³⁷ "Rwanda: Genocide Archives Released," Human Rights Watch report, April 2, 2024.

³⁸ Ibid. "Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions," Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2022.

³⁹ "Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions," Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2022.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, *'Join Us or Die': Rwanda's Extraterritorial Repression* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023); "Rwanda: Global Playbook of Abuse to Silence Critics," Human Rights Watch news release, October 10, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/rwanda-global-playbook-abuse-silence-critics>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

23. Rwandan authorities have also targeted relatives of real or perceived critics. The brothers of Noël Zihabamwe, who has been accused in pro-government media of being an opposition member, were tortured and later disappeared in September 2019. One of his brother's sons was also tortured.⁴³ In his September 2022 annual report, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the case of harassment against Zihabamwe and his relatives following his engagement with the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances on his brothers' case.⁴⁴

Rwanda should:

- Enable independent civil society organizations and journalists to operate freely and to investigate and publish information on sensitive subjects, including allegations of human rights abuses.
- Allow opposition parties to carry out their activities without intimidation or hindrance; release individuals prosecuted solely for the peaceful and legitimate expression of their views.
- Allow international journalists and human rights investigators, including from Human Rights Watch, to visit Rwanda and conduct their work freely.
- Immediately end the use of methods intended to muzzle and intimidate critics and dissidents abroad.
- Conduct credible and transparent investigations into deaths and disappearances of opposition members, civil society actors, journalists, and Rwandans abroad and prosecute perpetrators.

Right to Life, Liberty, Security, Physical Integrity, and to a Fair Trial

24. In 2021, Rwanda did not support recommendations calling on the country to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, amongst other treaties.⁴⁵ It indicated that it was "in the process of ascertaining whether all constitutional requirements are in place" for ratification.⁴⁶

25. While accepting some,⁴⁷ Rwanda rejected several recommendations relating to carrying out independent investigations into all allegations of enforced disappearances, arbitrary and prolonged detentions, extrajudicial executions, and torture and ill-treatment in detention centers. The authorities indicated those included "inaccurate assumptions," that such violations are "not part of the government's policy," and that such crimes were investigated whenever they happen.⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ UN Secretary-General's Assessment, "Report of the Secretary-General: Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights," A/HRC/51/47, September 14, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5147-cooperation-united-nations-its-representatives-andmechanisms> (accessed September 26, 2023).

⁴⁵ Human Rights Council, *Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14/Add.1 (May 20, 2021), recommendations 135.1-135.19,

⁴⁶ Ibid, para 1.4.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14/ (March 25, 2021), recommendations 134.31 and 134.27,

⁴⁸ Ibid, recommendations 135.33-135.37, 135.44, 135.45, 136.20, and 136.23; Human Rights Council, *Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Rwanda*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/47/14/Add.1 (May 20, 2021).

26. However, Human Rights Watch research shows that the government does not conduct credible and effective investigations into most allegations of extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, or prosecute alleged perpetrators. Rwandan authorities continued to arrest and detain people in unofficial military detention centers, where scores of detainees have been tortured in recent years.

Cases of suspicious deaths and disappearances

27. In February 2021, the 31-year-old singer and poet Innocent Bahati went missing. He was known for reciting his poems, which often focused on social issues Rwandans were facing, in videos posted on YouTube. The RIB said an investigation into his whereabouts was ongoing, but findings were never published. Bahati is still missing to this day.⁴⁹
28. In January 2023, John Williams Ntwali, a leading investigative journalist and editor of the newspaper *The Chronicles*, died under suspicious circumstances in an alleged road accident. Ntwali was regularly threatened and attacked in the pro-government media for his investigative reporting, was arrested in January 2016, and had told a friend seven months before his death that he had survived several “staged incidents” in Kigali.⁵⁰ Rwandan authorities have failed to conduct a credible and transparent investigation into Ntwali’s death. Instead, a trial was held without independent observers, where the alleged responsible driver pled guilty and was fined one million Rwandan francs (US\$920 at the time).⁵¹

Torture in Prison

29. In an October 2024 report, Human Rights Watch documented allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees from 2019 to 2024 in both official and unofficial facilities. Former detainees described the ordeal they faced in Rubavu and Nyarugenge prisons, including being forced into a tank filled with dirty water, submerged, and beaten.⁵² Human Rights Watch also found a pattern of ill-treatment, mock executions, beatings, and torture at an unofficial detention center which dates back to at least 2011.⁵³
30. Judges routinely ignore complaints from current and former detainees about unlawful detention and ill-treatment and the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has been unable or unwilling to report on cases of torture, creating an environment of near-total impunity.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2022* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2022), Rwanda chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/rwanda>.

⁵⁰ “Rwanda: Suspicious Death of Investigative Journalist,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 20, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/20/rwanda-suspicious-death-investigative-journalist>.

⁵¹ Lewis Mudge, “No Clarity Over Journalist’s Death in Rwanda,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, February 9, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/09/no-clarity-over-journalists-death-rwanda>.

⁵² Human Rights Watch, “They Threw Me in the Water and Beat Me”: The Need for Accountability for Torture in Rwanda (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/15/they-threw-me-water-and-beat-me/need-accountability-torture-rwanda>.

⁵³ Ibid.

31. However, in April 2024, the Rubavu High Court 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. Two other correctional services officers and seven prisoners, accused of acting under instruction, were convicted of beating and killing prisoners. The trial delivered only partial justice. Officials were convicted of assault and murder, but acquitted of torture, which carries a heavier penalty. Several senior prison officials were acquitted despite apparently damning evidence against them.⁵⁴ Kayumba's conviction was upheld and a senior prison official who was initially acquitted was convicted of beating prisoners on appeal in April 2025.
32. In November 2024, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) deferred the re-accreditation of Rwanda's NCHR, citing concerns over its failure to recognize serious human rights violations, including torture, and publicly report on them.⁵⁵ The NCHR's work does not comply fully with the Paris Principles and the institution does not fulfil its role as National Preventive Mechanism on torture.⁵⁶

Rwanda should:

- Conduct credible and independent investigations into the suspicious deaths of citizens, including political opponents, whether in custody or not, and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Conduct credible and independent investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in prison custody and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Ensure the independence of the NCHR so it conducts credible and transparent investigations into alleged human rights violations by state actors and fulfils its mandate as the national preventive mechanism.
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Conflict-related abuse in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

33. Rwanda has provided military and logistical support to the abusive M23 armed group since its resurgence in November 2021 in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, including as the group took control of Goma and Bukavu, the provincial capitals of North and South Kivu, in 2025. Human Rights Watch found that Rwanda's effective control over much of eastern Congo through its own armed forces and the M23 appears to meet the international humanitarian law standards for a belligerent occupation.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid; "Rwanda: Torture, Ill-Treatment in Detention," Human Rights Watch news release, October 15, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/15/rwanda-torture-ill-treatment-detention>.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025*, Rwanda chapter.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch Submission to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions on Rwanda, September 30, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/30/submission-global-alliance-national-human-rights-institutions-ganhri>.

⁵⁷ "DR Congo: M23 Armed Group Forcibly Transferring Civilians," Human Rights Watch report, June 18, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/18/dr-congo-m23-armed-group-forcibly-transferring-civilians>.

34. From 2021 onward, Rwanda-backed M23 fighters have been responsible for many laws-of-war violations, including summary executions, sexual violence, looting, and forcible transfers of populations.⁵⁸ They have also targeted critics and journalists.⁵⁹ Rwanda's effective control over the M23 makes it ultimately responsible for the armed group's numerous abuses in eastern Congo.
35. The Rwandan military has also been directly involved in violations of international humanitarian law in eastern Congo.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

Rwanda should:

- Take all necessary steps to provide for the safety of civilians in occupied areas, including civil society members and journalists, and ensure access to humanitarian aid.
- Cease supporting the abusive M23 armed group and committing violations of the laws of war.
- Credibly investigate alleged war crimes and other abuses by Rwandan security forces and the M23 group.
- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and implement the statute in national legislation, including by incorporating provisions to cooperate promptly and fully with the International Criminal Court.

⁵⁸ "DR Congo: Rwanda-backed M23 Executed Civilians in Goma," Human Rights Watch report, June 3, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/03/dr-congo-rwanda-backed-m23-executed-civilians-goma>; "DR Congo: Killings, Rapes by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels," Human Rights Watch report, June 13, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/13/dr-congo-killings-rapes-rwanda-backed-m23-rebels>; "DR Congo: Atrocities by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels," Human Rights Watch report, February 6, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/06/dr-congo-atrocities-rwanda-backed-m23-rebels>.

⁵⁹ "DR Congo: Rwanda-Backed M23 Target Journalists, Activists," Human Rights Watch report, March 12, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/12/dr-congo-rwanda-backed-m23-target-journalists-activists>.

⁶⁰ "DR Congo: Rwandan Forces, M23 Rebels Shell Civilians," Human Rights Watch report, September 26, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/26/dr-congo-rwandan-forces-m23-rebels-shell-civilians>.

⁶¹ Ibid. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025*, Rwanda chapter.