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The State of the World's Human Rights; Rwanda 2025

Forced evictions associated with urban development projects in the capital disproportionately affected low-income and marginalized populations. Labour rights protections were limited, and structural barriers impeded trade union activity. Civic space remained severely restricted and political opposition members faced unfair prosecution. A bilateral agreement was made that allowed the US to deport third-country nationals to Rwanda. Efforts to prosecute crimes related to the 1994 genocide continued through domestic judicial proceedings and international cooperation, resulting in an extradition and a conviction.

Background

The UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo concluded that Rwanda had provided “critical” support to the March 23 Movement (M23), an armed group operating in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). M23’s operations had displaced hundreds of thousands of people and caused significant loss of life.

In February, a European Parliament resolution threatened to suspend cooperation with Rwanda unless it ceased its interference in the DRC conflict and stopped exporting minerals from M23-controlled areas. Meanwhile, UN Security Council Resolution 2773 called on Rwanda to cease its support for M23 and withdraw its troops from the DRC. On 4 December a peace agreement was formalized when the DRC and Rwandan presidents signed the Washington Accords that reinforced previous commitments to end the fighting, which, however, continued (see Democratic Republic of the Congo entry).

Forced evictions

Large-scale urban development in the capital, Kigali, progressed rapidly. In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty expressed serious concerns about forced evictions and relocations in Kigali's informal settlements and areas designated as being at high risk of floods or landslides. Many residents reported receiving only a few days' notice before demolitions of their homes were carried out without prior consultation, compensation, provision of alternative housing, or meaningful opportunities to challenge decisions. These practices disproportionately affected low-income households and marginalized groups. They raised concerns that some relocations, justified on safety grounds, may in fact have served "commercial or aesthetic interests", thereby exacerbating inequality.

Workers' rights

Labour rights, including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, remained restricted in practice due to the broader limitations on civic space. UN bodies raised concerns about limitations imposed on trade unions that affected their ability to organize, as well as the inadequate enforcement of labour protections.

According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which reviewed Rwanda's fifth periodic report in February, trade union rights were restricted by burdensome requirements that hindered the ability of workers to become trade union representatives, lengthy registration timelines for forming trade unions, and the obligation to submit to compulsory arbitration or mediation before engaging in collective bargaining or strike action. Such restrictions significantly impeded the right to freedom of association within the labour movement.

In a statement following his May visit to Rwanda, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty said that despite the country's strong commitments to job creation, structural challenges undermined labour rights protections, including the lack of an adequate minimum wage, high levels of informal employment, insufficient enforcement mechanisms for labour regulation and the persistent use of child labour. He emphasized the need to strengthen protections for workers through increased labour inspections and by creating an environment to enable trade unions.

Freedom of expression and association

Civic space remained severely restricted, with authorities continuing to suppress dissenting voices across political, civil society and labour sectors. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (see above) urged Rwanda to strengthen protections for human rights defenders, including by simplifying NGO registration procedures.

The Committee said that the National Human Rights Commission (an official body) enjoyed limited independence, which further weakened accountability mechanisms. The selection process for its members was overseen by a presidential-appointed committee, and commissioners were obliged to obtain clearance from the Prime Minister's Office before undertaking official travel, undermining compliance with the Paris Principles (minimum standards that national human rights institutions must meet to be deemed credible and effective).

On 19 June, Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza was arrested at her home in Kigali by the Rwanda Investigations Bureau (RIB). The RIB said the arrest had been requested by the public prosecutor, in connection with a long-running case involving nine people, most of them members of her unregistered Development and Liberty for All (DALFA-Umurinzi) party. They had been arrested in 2021 and charged with "forming or joining a criminal organization" and "inciting public disorder". The authorities charged Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza in connection with allegations that she participated in or guided the group's alleged activities. She denied the charges.

There were concerns that the case, which was emblematic of a pattern of political repression, lacked any credible legal basis and was a means to criminalize peaceful political opposition.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

In August, Rwanda entered a bilateral agreement with the US government to, according to Rwandan officials, accept up to 250 migrants and asylum seekers facing deportation from the USA. By the end of August, Rwanda said it had received seven people under the scheme. As with previous agreements with Israel and the UK, this arrangement risked violations of the UN Refugee Convention, particularly the prohibition on refoulement, given Rwanda's human rights record and deficiencies in its asylum system. The country had not demonstrated an ability to ensure fair procedures, meaningful appeals, and adequate protection for individuals forcibly transferred from another jurisdiction.

In June, Rwanda launched its Refugee Sustainable Graduation Strategy (2025–2030), which aimed to enable refugee households to transition from long-term aid dependence to self-reliance. It aimed to benefit 50% of eligible refugee families by 2030. The strategy prioritized expanding access to education, vocational skills and employment, strengthening livelihood opportunities through private-sector integration, and improving social protection systems to help refugees withstand economic shocks.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

Rwanda continued to pursue justice and accountability for the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi population, including through domestic prosecutions and extradition requests to other countries.

In May, French judicial authorities announced they were closing the investigation into Agathe Habyarimana – the widow of Rwanda’s former president Juvénal Habyarimana – who had been accused of complicity in the genocide.

In August, François Gasana, who was arrested in Norway in 2022, was extradited to Rwanda where he faced trial on charges of participating in the genocide, including murdering a child and inciting killings. He had been convicted in Rwanda in his absence in 2007 for his role in the genocide.

In November, Germain Musonera, a former ruling party parliamentary candidate, was sentenced by the Kiyumba Primary Court in Rwanda to 20 years in prison for complicity in the genocide.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for
Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and
Documentation
(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße
32, 1041 Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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