

# The State of the World's Human Rights; Rwanda 2024

There was evidence of torture and other ill-treatment in detention, with a rare prosecution offering limited accountability. Enforced disappearances were reported. New restrictions on NGOs were introduced. The prosecution of opposition members for participating in a training on non-violent action continued. The legal framework for refugees was updated. Trials of suspected perpetrators of genocide took place in Rwanda and abroad. A UN committee made recommendations to address inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups of women.

## Background

In July, following presidential and parliamentary elections, Paul Kagame was elected president for a fourth term with 99.17% of the vote. Prior to the elections, the High Court refused requests for legal rehabilitation by opposition leaders Victoire Ingabire and Bernard Ntaganda, who both previously served prison sentences. This would have restored their civil rights and allowed them to stand for office.

The Rwanda Defence Force was involved in military operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) eastern region, and provided support to the M23 armed group.

Relations with Burundi remained tense. Burundi closed its land border with Rwanda in January, following attacks claimed by an armed group which the UN Group of Experts on the DRC accused Rwanda of supporting (see Burundi entry).

## Torture and other ill-treatment

Journalist Dieudonné Niyonsenga, who was arrested in 2020 for reporting on Covid-19 restrictions and was serving a seven-year sentence in Mageragere prison for forgery, impersonation and hindering public works, appeared at his appeal hearing in January. He bore visible signs of ill-treatment. He told the court that he was beaten frequently, detained in dark conditions in a hole that often filled with water, and that his hearing and eyesight were consequently impaired. His conviction was upheld in March and no investigation was conducted into his complaints of torture. He had previously complained to the court of torture and other ill-treatment in detention in 2022.

Eighteen prison officials and prisoners were prosecuted on charges including assault, murder and torture carried out at Rubavu prison. Among them was former prison director Innocent Kayumba, who was convicted of the assault and murder of a detainee in 2019 and sentenced in April to 15 years in prison and a fine. Three officials were acquitted, including another former prison director. Two other prison officers and seven prisoners who had been put in charge of security were convicted of beating and killing prisoners. No accused officials were found guilty of torture.

## Enforced disappearances

Reports of enforced disappearances continued. UN Special Procedures publicly called on Rwanda to provide information on the fate and whereabouts of three forcibly disappeared people. Rwandan human rights defender Yusuf Ahmed Gasana was abducted by unidentified people from his home in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2023 and allegedly transferred to Rwanda. Kenyan and Rwandan authorities did not respond to requests for information from his family, the UN Working Group on Enforced or

Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. There was no news of the fate or whereabouts of brothers Jean Nsengimana and Antoine Zihabamwe since police took them from a bus in Eastern Province in 2019.

Rwanda again failed to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

## **Freedom of expression and association**

In July, a new NGO law imposed restrictions on budgeting and management decisions of national NGOs, including an obligation not to exceed 20% of their budget on overhead costs without providing a written explanation to the Rwanda Governance Board, an official body. The law allows the board to definitively suspend NGOs for a range of activities that could be interpreted broadly.

In May, immigration officials denied entry to Human Rights Watch's (HRW) researcher Clementine de Montjoye at Kigali airport, citing "immigration reasons". She was the fourth HRW researcher to be blocked from entering Rwanda since 2008.

The prosecution of nine Development and Liberty for All (DALFA-Umurinzi) members (including one in her absence) and journalist Theoneste Nsengimana continued with a closed pretrial hearing on 18 October, followed by the trial which began in December. They were arrested in 2021 and faced charges in relation to their participation in a training on non-violent action, and for allegedly planning to mobilize the population and inspire non-cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

## **Refugees' and migrants' rights**

In April, Rwanda's legal framework was amended to establish detailed procedures for asylum applications and to institute an asylum appeals tribunal.

Also in April the UK parliament passed the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. However, plans to implement a deal to send asylum seekers to Rwanda were postponed, and the incoming UK government scrapped the deal (see UK entry).

Rwanda continued to host large numbers of refugees, primarily from neighbouring DRC (60.8%) and Burundi (38.4%). By the end of October, it had registered over 135,000 refugees and asylum seekers.

## **Right to truth, justice and reparation**

In April, Rwanda marked the 30th anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi population, in which an estimated 800,000 people were killed, including Hutu people and others who opposed the genocide and the extremist government that orchestrated it.<sup>2</sup>

In April, Huye Intermediate Court convicted Beatrice Munyenyezi of murder as a genocide crime, complicity in genocide, incitement to commit genocide and complicity in rape, and sentenced her to life imprisonment. She was acquitted on the charge of planning genocide. She had been deported from the USA in 2021.

In May the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals announced that the remaining fugitives indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Charles Ryandikayo and Charles Sikubwabo, were deceased.

A Belgian court sentenced Emmanuel Nkunduwimye to 25 years in prison in June after finding him guilty of war crimes and genocide for murder, rape and attempted murder.

On 31 July, Wenceslas Twagirayezu was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity by the Court of Appeal in the capital, Kigali. In January he had been acquitted by the High Court Chamber for International Crimes (HCCIC) after being extradited from Denmark in 2018.

In September, Venant Rutunga was found guilty as an accomplice to genocide and complicity in extermination as a crime against humanity. The HCCIC sentenced him to 20 years in prison. He had been extradited from the Netherlands in 2021.

On 30 October a Paris court found Eugene Rwamucyo guilty of complicity in genocide, complicity in crimes against humanity and conspiring to prepare those crimes but acquitted him of genocide and crimes against humanity. He received a 27-year prison sentence.

## **Women's rights**

The CEDAW Committee considered Rwanda's periodic report in May. While recognizing the government's efforts to promote gender equality, it raised concerns about inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups, including women and girls with disabilities, and rural, Batwa and refugee women. It noted the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that constitute an underlying cause of gender-based violence against women, recommending that the lesser penalty for marital rape should correspond with the standard penalty for the crime of rape. The Committee welcomed measures to increase women's financial literacy and access to financial credit, but remained concerned about the significant gender gap in access to loans and barriers to accessing credit, including collateral requirements, and women's limited agency to manage land resources jointly owned by both spouses.

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