



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW SUBMISSION FOR RWANDA

NGO Submission

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ABOUT HRF

The Human Rights Foundation (HRF) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, with a focus on closed societies. HRF unites people in the common cause of defending human rights and promoting liberal democracy. Our mission is to ensure that freedom is both preserved and promoted around the world.

HRF's Center for Law and Democracy (HRF-CLD) is a program of HRF. HRF-CLD promotes legal scholarship in the areas of comparative constitutional law and international law, with a focus on international human rights law and international democracy law.

INTRODUCTION

This submission was prepared by HRF, for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Rwanda. In this submission, HRF evaluates Rwanda's implementation of recommendations made during its previous UPR, as it relates to the current human rights situation in the country, which is characterized by systematic, widespread, and gross violations of human rights, including: ongoing arbitrary arrests/detentions, violation of due process, curtailment of freedom of expression and press, and far-reaching transnational repression — obscured by widespread reputation laundering.

FOLLOW-UP ON THE PREVIOUS REVIEW

1. The most recent UPR of Rwanda by the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council took place from January 18 to February 8, 2021.¹ The Human Rights Council considered and adopted the outcome of the country's review during its

¹ *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Rwanda*, OHCHR (Mar. 2021), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/14>.

47th Session, from June to July 2021.² A total of 283 recommendations were made to Rwanda, with the government accepting 160 recommendations and noting 133.³

2. As a UN Member State, Rwanda has committed to protect, promote, and respect the individual rights and fundamental freedoms laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Notably, Rwanda has also ratified the ICCPR,⁴ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),⁵ the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT),⁶ and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁷
3. Domestically, Rwanda's Constitution, last amended in 2023, formally enshrines the protection of human rights (*see infra Rwanda's National Framework for Protecting Human Rights*). However, despite these constitutional guarantees, individuals in Rwanda are routinely subjected to human rights violations.

RWANDA'S NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

4. Rwanda's Constitution⁸ contains several provisions relating to the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens.
5. Regarding freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, the Constitution states in *Article 24*:

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Ratification Status for Rwanda*, UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=145&Lang=EN

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda*, Republika Y'u Rwanda (April 2023), <https://www.minecofin.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=85852&token=bbf2750a8f262658fba1c14f006285a36818abdc>.

No one shall be subjected to prosecution, arrest, detention or punishment unless provided for by laws in force at the time the offence alleged against him or her was committed.

6. Regarding due process, the Constitution states in Article 29:

Everyone has the right to due process of law, which includes the right:

- (a) to be informed of the nature and cause of charges and the right to defence and legal representation*
- (b) to be presumed innocent until proved guilty by a competent Court;*
- (c) to appear before a competent Court;*
- (d) not to be subjected to prosecution, arrest, detention, or punishment on account of any act or omission which did not constitute an offence under national or international law at the time it was committed.*
- (e) not to be held liable for an offence he or she did not commit; criminal liability is personal*

7. Regarding freedom of press, expression, and access to information, the Constitution states in Article 38:

Freedom of press, of expression and of access to information are recognised and guaranteed by the State.

8. Regarding limitation of rights and freedoms, the Constitution states in Article 41:
In exercising rights and freedoms, everyone is subject only to limitations provided for by the law aimed at ensuring recognition of and respect for other people's rights and freedoms, as well as public morals, public order and social welfare which generally characterise a democratic society.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

9. Rwanda is a multiparty republic in east-central Africa, bordered by Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁹ The vast majority of Rwanda's population belongs to one of two ethnic groups — Hutu or Tutsi.¹⁰ The

⁹ Rwanda, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rwanda>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

Tutsi traditionally held political, social, and economic control in Rwanda, including during the German and Belgian colonial eras.¹¹ However, in 1959, Rwanda became a Hutu-led republic through communal elections that followed the revolutionary uprising.¹² In response, more than 150,000 Tutsi sought refuge in neighboring countries.¹³

10. In 1990, historic tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis erupted in the Rwandan Civil War, which was fought between the Hutu-led Rwandan Armed Forces (RAF) and the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).¹⁴ After a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down on April 6, 1994, extremist Hutu militias initiated targeted attacks of Tutsis and moderate Hutus.¹⁵ The hundred-day period that followed, known as the Rwandan Genocide, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 800,000 people.¹⁶
11. Paul Kagame, a former commander of the RPF, assumed power as Rwanda's *de facto* leader in 1994, while serving as vice president.¹⁷ He ascended to the presidency after President Pasteur Bizimungu's resignation in 2000 and has since been re-elected four times.¹⁸ Although the presidency was previously limited to two seven-year terms, a 2015 constitutional referendum allowed Kagame a third seven-year term, with the possibility of a five-year term afterward.¹⁹
12. In 2024, Paul Kagame was re-elected with a reported 99.2% of the vote.²⁰ Numerous opposition candidates were barred from running, including Diane Rwigara and Victoire Ingabire.²¹ The regime-controlled Rwanda Governance

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Rwanda: A Brief History of the Country*, Outreach Programme on the Rwandan Genocide and the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml#1960s>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Rwanda Country Profile*, BBC (July 16, 2024), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14093238>.

¹⁷ *Rwanda*, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rwanda>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Rwanda: A Brief History of the Country*, Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml#1960s>.

²⁰ *Freedom in the World 2025: Rwanda*, Freedom House (2025), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2025>.

²¹ *Id.*

Board (RBG) can deny party registration at its discretion, making Rwanda a *de facto* one-party state, ruled by Kagame and the RPF.²² Furthermore, elections in Rwanda are marked by ballot stuffing, political intimidation, and blocking of opposition challengers.²³

13. To maintain power, the RPF targets those considered a threat to the regime through intimidation, surveillance, detention, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings, both within and outside Rwanda.²⁴ The regime fails to ensure due process and credible investigation into the targeting of opponents. Poor conditions, torture, and arbitrary detention are commonplace across detention facilities in Rwanda.²⁵

ARBITRARY ARRESTS, DETENTIONS, AND VIOLATIONS OF DUE PROCESS OF THE LAW

14. While the Rwandan Constitution formally enshrines personal liberties with restrictions allowed only in certain circumstances, the regime uses politically motivated arrests and detentions, denial of due process, and false charges to suppress and/or punish dissenters or oppositional voices.

15. For example, Paul Rusesabagina, a human rights activist famed for his protection of more than 1,000 refugees during the Rwandan Genocide and a critic of Kagame, was abducted by Rwandan officials in Dubai in 2020.²⁶ After being sedated, restrained, blindfolded, and flown against his will to Rwanda, Rusesabagina was sentenced to 25 years in prison on false charges of terrorism in September 2021.²⁷ His trial was marked by serious due process violations, including denial of access

²² *Id.*

²³ *Freedom in the World 2025: Rwanda*, Freedom House (2025), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2025>.

²⁴ *Rwanda*, Freedom House (2025), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2025>.

²⁵ *Rwanda: Torture, Ill-Treatment in Detention*, Human Rights Watch (October 15, 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/15/rwanda-torture-ill-treatment-detention>.

²⁶ *Opinions Adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its Ninety-Second Session, 15-19 November 2021, Opinion No. 81/2021 concerning Paul Rusesabagina (Rwanda)*, United Nations (March 18, 2022), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A-HRC-WGAD-2021-81-Rwanda-AEV.pdf>.

²⁷ *Id.*

to his private lawyers and interception of privileged communications between him and his family.²⁸ Rusesabagina remained in detention for two-and-a-half years, during which time he spent 260 days in solitary confinement and was denied treatment for his hypertension and cardiovascular disease.²⁹ In 2022, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) found that Rusesabagina's detention constituted an enforced disappearance and was without legal basis.³⁰ Rusesabagina's sentence was commuted by presidential pardon in 2023, only after he pledged to return to the United States and stay out of Rwandan politics.³¹

16. The Rwandan regime stifles the opposition's challenges to Kagame's power by arbitrarily detaining them and limiting their freedoms, thereby perpetuating the RPF's *de facto* one-party rule. Victoire Ingabire Umuhuza, leader of the DALFA-Umurinzi party, served eight years in prison from 2010-2018, after being falsely charged with "genocide denial" and "conspiracy against the state."³² The African Court on Human and People's Rights ruled that Rwanda had violated Ingabire's right to freedom of expression and a fair trial.³³ Although she was released in 2018, Ingabire faces severe restrictions, including limitations on her freedom to leave Rwanda and the inability to reunite with her family in the Netherlands.³⁴ She has been barred from running for presidential elections in Rwanda.³⁵

17. Eight members of DALFA-Umurinzi faced trial in December 2024, after participating in a training on nonviolent action and campaign, along with journalist Théoneste Nsengimana, who planned to cover one of the party's

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Rwanda 2023*, Amnesty International (2023), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/rwanda/report-rwanda/>.

³² *Rwanda: Eight-Year Sentence for Opposition Leader*, Human Rights Watch (Oct. 13, 2012), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/30/rwanda-eight-year-sentence-opposition-leader>.

³³ *Ingabire Victoire Umuhoza v. Rwanda*, Global Freedom of Expression, Columbia University, <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/ingabire-victoire-umuhoza-v-rwanda/#:~:text=The%20African%20Court%20on%20Human,International%20Covenant%20on%20Civil%20and>.

³⁴ *Statement on the Inhumane Treatment of Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza by the Rwandan Government*, New York City Bar (Mar. 3, 2025), <https://www.nycbar.org/press-releases/statement-on-the-inhumane-treatment-of-victoire-ingabire-umuhoza-by-the-rwandan-government/>.

³⁵ *Freedom in the World 2025: Rwanda*, Freedom House (2025), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2025>.

events.³⁶ The nine defendants, arrested in October and December 2021, have spent three years arbitrarily detained, awaiting trial.³⁷ The politicians face sentences ranging from 20 years to life imprisonment on trumped-up charges of forming or joining a criminal association, conspiracy to commit an offense against the ruling power, conspiracy to cause uprisings and unrest among the population, conspiracy to attack the force of the law, and conspiracy to organize unlawful demonstrations or public meetings.³⁸ Nsengimana, meanwhile, is charged with forming or joining a criminal association and publishing rumors.³⁹ In August 2024, the UNWGAID issued an opinion calling for the immediate release of the nine dissidents and concluding that Rwandan officials had failed to establish a legal basis for their detention.⁴⁰

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION, AND PRESS

18. The rights to the freedoms of expression, association, and press are formally enshrined within the Rwandan Constitution⁴¹ and human rights treaties to which Rwanda is a state party. Despite these protections and having accepted several recommendations from States to enhance the protection of journalists and human rights defenders during its previous UPR cycle, the Rwandan regime consistently uses tactics including surveillance, harassment, intimidation, arbitrary detention, prosecution, and violence to silence critics and independent media.

19. The Rwandan media landscape is controlled by the regime and stakeholders with ties to the ruling party. At least seventeen journalists have been jailed for their

³⁶ *Rwanda: Authorities Must Immediately Release Detained Journalist and Members of Political Opposition*, Amnesty International (Dec. 5, 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/rwanda-authorities-must-immediately-release-detained-journalist-and-members-of-political-opposition/>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *HRF Succeeds in UN Petition: Rwanda Condemned for Unlawful Detentions of Nine Dissidents*, Human Rights Foundation (Aug. 20, 2024), <https://hrf.org/latest/hrf-succeeds-in-un-petition-rwanda-condemned-for-unlawful-detention-of-nine-dissidents/>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

work since Kagame became president.⁴² At present, two journalists remain arbitrarily imprisoned.⁴³ Dieudonné Niyonsenga, director of the YouTube channel Ishema TV, was sentenced to seven years in prison for “humiliating state officials” in 2021.⁴⁴ As mentioned above, Théoneste Nsengimana has been behind bars since October 2021 for planning to cover an event organized by DALFA-Umurinzi members.⁴⁵

20. Detained journalists are subject to serious human rights abuses, including torture.

At his retrial in January 2024, Dieudonné Niyonsenga described being held in a hole that was often filled with water and did not have access to light.⁴⁶ He reportedly appeared frail and had a visible head wound.⁴⁷ Niyonsenga is serving a seven-year sentence at Nyarugenge prison, where he is frequently beaten,⁴⁸ and there have been numerous reports from people who have seen wounds on Niyonsenga’s face and body during his detention.⁴⁹ Niyonsenga stated before a Kigali court that his hearing and eyesight have become impaired after three years of detention under inhumane and violent conditions.⁵⁰

21. Similarly, Aimable Karasira Uzaramba, a YouTube political commentator who was arrested in late 2021 and charged with genocide denial, genocide justification, inciting divisions, and illicit enrichment, has alleged that he was tortured and denied medical care in prison.⁵¹ He testified that prison officials beat him, deprived

⁴² *Rwanda: RSF Sounds the Alarm on President Kagame’s Horrific Press Freedom Record as Election Looms*, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/rwanda-rsf-sounds-alarm-president-kagame-s-horrific-press-freedom-record-election-looms#:~:text=Three%20journalists%20have%20been%20murdered,are%20forced%20to%20self%2Dcensor>.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Rwandan YouTube Star Jailed for ‘Humiliating’ State Officials*, Al Jazeera (Nov. 12, 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/12/rwandan-youtube-star-jailed-for-humiliating-state-officials>.

⁴⁵ *Rwanda: Authorities Must Immediately Release Detained Journalist and Members of Political Opposition*, Amnesty International (Dec. 5, 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/rwanda-authorities-must-immediately-release-detained-journalist-and-members-of-political-opposition/>.

⁴⁶ *Rwanda: End Abuses Against Journalists*, Human Rights Watch (January 18, 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/18/rwanda-end-abuses-against-journalists>.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Rwandan Journalist Dieudonné Niyonsenga Says He Was Beaten, Detained in a ‘Hole,’* Committee to Protect Journalists (Jan. 31, 2024), <https://cpj.org/2024/01/rwandan-journalist-dieudonne-niyonsenga-says-he-was-beaten-detained-in-hole/>.

⁴⁹ *Rwanda: Jailed Critic Denounces Torture in Prison*, Human Rights Watch (June 13, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/13/rwanda-jailed-critic-denounces-torture-prison>.

⁵⁰ *Rwanda: Events of 2024*, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/rwanda>.

⁵¹ *Aimable Karasira Uzaramba*, Committee to Protect Journalists (May 31, 2021), <https://cpj.org/data/people/aimable-karasira-uzaramba/>.

him of sleep, denied him adequate food and treatment for his diabetes and mental illness, and interfered in confidential client-lawyer communications.⁵²

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

22. The Rwandan regime has a significant record of extending the reach of repression beyond its borders violating the human rights of dissidents outside of its territorial jurisdiction. The surveillance and intimidation of Rwandan diaspora communities is a function of the regime's desire to maintain influence. By leaving Rwanda and consequently gaining a greater ability to criticize its regime, refugees or diaspora members pose a threat to the positive image that Kagame wishes to project to the world.
23. Since Sergeant Major Robert Kabera's 2020 escape to Uganda due to political persecution, Rwandan officials have made demands that the Ugandan government deport Kabera along with other government opponents.⁵³ On May 16, 2022, dozens of policemen and military officers arrested Kabera in Kampala, Uganda, for allegedly smuggling weapons.⁵⁴ According to Kabera, the officers wanted to kidnap him and took him to a police station where he saw Rwandan officials.⁵⁵ Although his warrant was canceled, Kabera continues to face threats and harassment; in July 2022, he reported an assault by a group of men who stated, "We will take you back home, you will see." In November 2022, his wife was taken from their home in Kampala, an incident which was noted by the Ugandan police in a June 2023 report with a statement from a source who said that she "was kidnapped by the Republic of Rwanda security operatives (agents) taken back to her country of origin (Rwanda) where is alive and well todote [sic]."⁵⁶ Her whereabouts remain unknown.

⁵² *Rwanda: Jailed Critic Denounces Torture in Prison*, Human Rights Watch (June 13, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/13/rwanda-jailed-critic-denounces-torture-prison>.

⁵³ *Join Us or Die: Rwanda's Extraterritorial Repression*, Human Rights Watch (Oct. 10, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/10/10/join-us-or-die/rwandas-extraterritorial-repression>.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Join Us or Die: Rwanda's Extraterritorial Repression*, Human Rights Watch (Oct. 10, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/10/10/join-us-or-die/rwandas-extraterritorial-repression>.

24. During a March 2022 visit to Uganda, Robert Mukombozi, an RNC member and former journalist based in Australia, was taken by Ugandan officials to a military facility, where he was told that his life was in danger and that “Kagame was pressuring them, but that they didn’t want to hand over an Australian citizen,” after which he was asked to leave the country.⁵⁷
25. To silence critics abroad, the Rwandan regime targets relatives who remain in Rwanda, with family members facing surveillance and harassment. In July 2021, Australian citizen Noël Zihabamwe filed a complaint to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances regarding the disappearance of his two brothers, Jean Nsegimana and Antoine Zihabamwe.⁵⁸ Since moving to Australia in 2006, Noël Zihabamwe had become a highly regarded human rights advocate. Upon being approached in Australia by Rwandan officials seeking to recruit him as an agent of influence and his refusal in 2016, he became subject to ongoing harassment by the regime.⁵⁹ After Zihabamwe shared his story in 2019, his brothers were abducted by Rwandan police and have not been seen since September 28, 2019.⁶⁰ His family in Rwanda has faced harassment, intimidation, and questioning regarding his work in Australia.⁶¹
26. Several exiles have been executed during Kagame’s presidency. In 2021, former army officer Revocant Karemangingo was shot dead in Mozambique and opposition leader Cassien Ntamuhanga mysteriously disappeared, following an arrest by seven Mozambican agents.⁶² Opposition politician Seif Bamporiki was shot dead in South Africa in 2021.⁶³ All three men had a track record of public criticism of, and opposition to, Kagame’s leadership.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Noël Zihabamwe Communication to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, Australian Human Rights Institute, <https://www.humanrights.unsw.edu.au/news/noel-zihabamwe-communication-united-nations-working-group-enforced-and-involuntary-disappearances>.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Mozambique: Grave Concerns for Rwandan Asylum Seeker*, Human Rights Watch (June 15, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/15/mozambique-grave-concerns-rwandan-asylum-seeker>.

⁶³ *Rwanda: RSF Sounds the Alarm on President Kagame’s Horrific Press Freedom Record as Election Looms*, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/rwanda-rsf-sounds-alarm-president-kagame-s-horrific-press-freedom-record-election-looms#:~:text=Three%20journalists%20have%20been%20murdered,are%20forced%20to%20self%2Dcensor>.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

27. Furthermore, Rwanda is a leading consumer of the NSO Group-produced Pegasus spyware and similar forms of electronic surveillance, through which it gains intelligence and targets opposition both within and outside of its borders.⁶⁵ The phone of Carine Kanimba, Paul Rusesabagina’s daughter, was found to have been “bombarded with Pegasus” in 2021.⁶⁶ Approximately 3,500 activists, journalists, and politicians have reportedly been targeted with Pegasus by the Rwandan regime.⁶⁷

REPUTATION LAUNDERING

28. Despite its record of blatant human rights abuses, Rwanda enjoys a relatively positive perception on the international stage, due to its concerted image control efforts.

29. Kagame has long used involvement in sports to gain positive press and distract from his poor human rights record. Rwanda sponsors several major European soccer teams, including Arsenal, Paris Saint-Germain, and Bayern Munich, through its “Visit Rwanda” campaign to promote tourism.⁶⁸ The nation is also tied to the National Basketball Association’s Basketball Africa League, hosting its inaugural season and first four championships in 2021.⁶⁹ In 2024, Kagame announced a bid to host a Formula 1 race, and the 2025 cycling World Road

⁶⁵ *Pegasus Project: Rwandan Authorities Chose Thousands of Activists, Journalists, and Politicians to Target with NSO Spyware*, Amnesty International (July 19, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/rwandan-authorities-chose-thousands-of-activists-journalists-and-politicians-to-target-with-nso-spyware/>.

⁶⁶ Ronen Bergman and Mark Mazzetti, *The Battle for the World’s Most Powerful Cyberweapon*, *The New York Times Magazine* (Jan. 28, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/magazine/nso-group-israel-spyware.html>.

⁶⁷ *Pegasus Project: Rwandan Authorities Chose Thousands of Activists, Journalists, and Politicians to Target with NSO Spyware*, Amnesty International (July 19, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/rwandan-authorities-chose-thousands-of-activists-journalists-and-politicians-to-target-with-nso-spyware/>.

⁶⁸ Rob Stebens and Emery Makumeno, *Arsenal, PSG, and Bayern Urged to End Visit Rwanda Deals*, BBC (Feb. 2, 2025), <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/articles/cp3w76rl476o#:~:text=A%20sleeve%20partnership%20with%20Arsenal,partnership%20with%20Rwanda%20in%202023>.

⁶⁹ Jack Maloney, *Congo Reportedly Asks NBA to Cut Ties with Rwanda, which is Central to the Basketball Africa League* (Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.cbssports.com/nba/news/congo-reportedly-asks-nba-to-cut-ties-with-rwanda-which-is-central-to-the-basketball-africa-league/>.

Championships are set to occur in Kigali.⁷⁰ In 2025, the Democratic Republic of Congo requested that sports franchises end sponsorship deals with Rwandan entities and relocate major events due to the occupation of Rwandan troops in the country's eastern region.⁷¹

30. In June 2022, Rwanda hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.⁷² Officials rounded up and arbitrarily detained over a dozen unhoused people, sex workers, street children, and gay and transgender people under poor conditions at the Gikondo transit center, in advance of the meeting.⁷³ Gay or transgender-identifying detainees said that officials accused them of “not representing Rwandan values.”⁷⁴ Other Kigali residents reported being instructed to advertise tourism,⁷⁵ dress well, or stay off the streets.⁷⁶ The regime has carried out other attempts to “clean up” Kigali before high-profile events, such as the 2016 African Union Summit.⁷⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. HRF calls on Rwanda to:

- a. Protect, respect, and promote the rights of all individuals to the freedoms of expression and association;

⁷⁰ Adrian Blomfield, *Rwanda Shrugs Off ‘Sportswashing’ Criticism in Pursuit of a Winning Development Formula* (Oct. 18, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/rwanda-f1-sportswashing-kagame-1b4c178adaa2feef3c95bd2d8af0c425>.

⁷¹ Jack Maloney, *Congo Reportedly Asks NBA to Cut Ties with Rwanda, Which is Central to the Basketball Africa League* (Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.cbssports.com/nba/news/congo-reportedly-asks-nba-to-cut-ties-with-rwanda-which-is-central-to-the-basketball-africa-league/>.

⁷² 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), The Commonwealth, <https://thecommonwealth.org/chogm-2022>.

⁷³ *Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting*, Human Rights Watch (Sept. 27, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/27/rwanda-round-ups-linked-commonwealth-meeting>.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ Abdi Latif Dahir, *Commonwealth Meeting in Rwanda Has a Long Agenda. Human Rights Isn’t on It*, The New York Times (June 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/24/world/africa/rwanda-commonwealth-human-rights.html>.

⁷⁶ *Kigali Cleanup Hits Unfortunate*, Voice of America Africa (June 22, 2022), <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/kigali-cleanup-hits-unfortunate/6627970.html>.

⁷⁷ *Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting*, Human Rights Watch (Sept. 27, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/27/rwanda-round-ups-linked-commonwealth-meeting>.

- b. Ensure that activists, journalists, and opposition politicians can operate peacefully and safely in Rwanda, without fear of retribution in the form of censorship, harassment, arbitrary arrest, and detention, among other types of punishment, including by holding those who threaten, harass, and assault them accountable;
- c. Protect the due process rights of every accused person to a fair, speedy, and public trial and ensure that individuals who have been arbitrarily detained in violation of their rights to freedom of expression and association, are released, and that those in detention receive humane treatment; and
- d. Cooperate with regional and international human rights mechanisms — rather than resorting to obscuring abuses through reputation laundering — including by carrying out independent investigations on all human rights violations conducted under the current administration, both within Rwanda's borders and transnationally.