



Rwanda - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 8 January 2014

Treatment of the political opposition in Rwanda

A report issued in October 2013 by the *East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project* points out that:

“Parliamentary elections were held in Rwanda in September 2013. As universally predicted the ruling party of President Paul Kagame, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), maintained a large electoral majority, winning 76% of the vote, and 40 out of 53 directly elected seats. No serious challenger to the RPF was able to meaningfully participate in the elections. The leaders of two opposition parties, Bernard Ntaganda of the PS-Imberakuri, and Victoire Ingabire of the FDU-Inkingi, have both been imprisoned since 2010. The PS-Imberakuri, whilst able to register for the recent elections was taken over by a pro-RPF faction. Those loyal to its former leader Ntaganda have been ‘paralysed by constant threats and intimidation’ “ (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (28 October 2013) *Overview of the Human Rights Situation in the East and Horn of Africa, April– September 2013: Rwanda*).

A publication issued in September 2013 by the *United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office* states:

“Political space for all parties to engage with the electorate and to campaign prior to elections remains constrained” (United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office (17 October 2013) *Human Rights and Democracy 2012: Case study: Rwanda – freedom of association and expression*).

In September 2013 *BBC News* notes:

“Rwanda's governing RPF party has won a resounding victory in parliamentary elections, securing 76% of the vote. The party of President Paul Kagame, which came to power after the genocide of 1994, won 40 of the 53 seats directly elected on Monday. The opposition FDU-Inkingi, whose leader Victoire Ingabire is in jail, did not take part in the election, as it is not officially registered. Two other parties regarded as close to the RPF took 13% and 9% of the vote” (BBC News (17 September 2013) *Rwanda election: RPF wins parliamentary landslide*).

This document also points out that:

“The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government has been praised for maintaining stability and overseeing rapid economic growth since the slaughter of some 800,000 minority ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus. But President Kagame has been increasingly accused of ignoring human rights and stamping out any opposition” (ibid).

A document published in August 2013 by *Human Rights Watch* states:

“Rwanda's last three elections have all been characterized by a stark absence of opposition to the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)” (Human Rights Watch (12 August 2013) *Dispatches: Rwanda's Green Party registered at last – but what does it really mean?*).

This report also states:

“Strictly speaking, the RPF is not the only party in Rwanda. Several others are represented in parliament and will be fielding candidates in next month's elections. But these parties do not play the role of a political opposition. Not only do they not challenge the RPF, they actively support it” (ibid).

A report issued in April 2013 by the *United States Department of State* commenting on events of 2012 notes:

“The most important human rights problems in the country remained the government's targeting of journalists, political opponents, and human rights advocates for harassment, arrest, and abuse” (United States Department of State (19 April 2013) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012, Rwanda, Executive Summary*).

This document also states:

“Some parties were not able to operate freely, and parties and candidates faced legal sanctions if found guilty of engaging in divisive acts, destabilizing national unity, threatening territorial integrity, or undermining national security. The government's enforcement of laws against genocide ideology, divisionism, and spreading false information with intent to create a hostile international opinion against the Rwandan state discouraged debate or criticism of the government and resulted in occasional detentions” (ibid, Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government/Elections and Political Participation/Political Parties).

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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