



FREEDOM NOW

## **Statement Delivered at the 37<sup>th</sup> UPR Pre-Session State Under Review: Rwanda**

Hello, I am Karl Horberg, Senior Program Officer for Freedom Now, a US-based human rights organization dedicated to ending government repression and freeing political prisoners worldwide.

Today, I will highlight the Rwandan government's violations of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. The information I present is based on our own work and research with Rwandan sources. A more detailed account is available in the report we presented to the Human Rights Council.

### **Arbitrary Detention**

Arbitrary detention was highlighted during Rwanda's previous UPR. Rwanda noted recommendations to release persons detained for their political views and/or for peaceful and legitimate expression.

In September 2018, President Kagame pardoned more than 2,000 prisoners, including Victoire Ingabire, leader of an unregistered opposition party.

Rwanda continues to detain its citizens for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Although there is no definitive list of prisoners of conscience in Rwanda, a survey conducted by Human Rights Watch found that at least 104 individuals were arbitrarily detained by the military between 2010 and 2017. During the reporting period, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued two opinions finding serious human rights violations regarding the detention of five individuals in Rwanda. Two of the named individuals remained detained and compensation has not been awarded to any of the formerly detained individuals.

We have two recommendations. First, amend Article 96 of the Penal Code regarding incitement to genocide to bring it into line with international standards for freedom of expression. Second, abide by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's decision to release Frank Rusagara and Tom Byabagamba, former military officers serving 15 year sentences for privately criticizing the government.

### **Enforced Disappearances**

At the previous UPR, Rwanda accepted two recommendations to investigate all instances of enforced disappearances. No public report has been released about investigations.

Nevertheless, at least eight members of opposition parties have disappeared since 2016. For example, opposition activist Illuminee Iragena disappeared in March 2016. Sources allege that she was tortured and died while in custody.

We recommend Rwanda's National Commission for Human Rights conduct a thorough investigation of all cases of enforced disappearances, including Illuminee Iragena and Boniface Twagirimana, an opposition activist who disappeared from prison in October 2018. The results of these investigations should be publicly published and widely disseminated.

### **Extrajudicial Killings**

The issue of extrajudicial killings was not raised at Rwanda's previous UPR.

The Global Campaign for Rwandan's Human Rights has documented at least 129 extrajudicial killings between 2016 and 2019. This includes the summary execution of 37 suspected petty offenders by security forces in Rwanda's Western Province between July 2016 and March 2017.

We recommend Rwanda invite the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to conduct a country visit within the next year to investigate these deaths, including those of opposition activist Anselme Mutuyimana who was found dead in March 2019 and singer Kizito Mihigo who died in prison in February 2020.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these important issues.