Twenty years since the genocide, we would have hoped that Rwanda’s post-genocide leadership had learnt very important lessons from its past dark history and established a state guided by rule of law, free of oppression and inequality, where instructions are stronger than individuals and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are the norm.

We would have hoped that the only news we would be reading about Rwanda would be news related to its reconciled people and its good governance practices that sustain peace that many countries would be learning from.

We would have hoped to read more about Rwandans promoting peace in other countries not fuelling conflicts in neighbouring countries.

We would have hoped that all Rwandans would have gained a strong sense of belonging and freedom to participate in all areas of their society without fear of persecution.

We would have hoped that no one would have to go into exile fleeing harassment and persecution.

Unfortunately the current Rwandan reality is far worse than that and unfortunately worse than it was in the pre-genocide era in many important areas.

In current Rwanda, not only are many people going into exile, but in addition, the Rwandan government is pursuing them in order to get them extradited back to Rwanda, to abduct them, or to assassinate them.

Most recently there seems to be a trend of the Rwandan government asking Western countries to extradite Rwandan critics who have been living abroad for many years. In many cases, those refugees have been granted refugee status and citizenship in countries to which they had fled due to risks they faced in Rwanda. In some cases, refugee status is being taken away. This has been the case for some Rwandans in the Netherlands.

During his visit to Rwanda in early January 2014, the Dutch State Secretary of Security and Justice and Minister for Migration, Mr. Fred Teeven, negotiated the extradition of Rwandan refugees in the Netherlands. ‘We are willing to extradite people to Rwanda where possible,’ said Mr. Fred Teeven. Many of these ‘suspects’ (according to the Rwandan regime) have been living in the Netherlands for more than 10 years and have already acquired Dutch citizenship. But nobody is out of reach; their rights as citizens are being withdrawn in order to complete the extradition request from the Rwandan regime.
According to article 14, paragraph 1 of the Law on Dutch citizenship; one might lose Dutch citizenship if it is proven that they have lied or hidden relevant information during the citizenship acquisition procedure. However, due process is not being followed. Many are losing their rights without having the opportunity to defend them in court.

One of those targeted arrived in the Netherlands in 1997 with his family. Shortly after, they were all granted refugee status as the Dutch government believed it was not safe for him and his family to go back to Rwanda. Five years later, he was given Dutch citizenship following intensive investigations. As one of the virulent critics of the regime, he was approached by Kagame's regime in 2003 and asked to go back and work for them. He believed it was a way to silence him, so he refused. The same year, he suddenly appeared on the Interpol list as per Rwanda's request. A few years later, driving back home, he was arrested in the presence of his daughter, because a Dutch policeman had done a routine check and found his name on the Interpol list. However, after his lawyer took a close look into his dossier, he realised that it was empty and his client was immediately released with an apology from the police.

Now, 16 years later, after he and his family are fully integrated into Dutch society, he is being asked to relinquish his Dutch citizenship. All of a sudden, his dossier that stayed empty until 2010 is full of evidence that implicates him in criminal activities back in Rwanda.

2010 was the year the Rwandan opposition leader Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, who was also a refugee in the Netherlands, went back to Rwanda. The Kigali regime wanted to cut Mrs Ingabire’s supportive base in the Netherlands and found an efficient system of doing so by publishing false accusations on the blog run by its operatives and in the Rwandan government supporting newspaper, the New Times. As Kagame’s Rwanda does not tolerate any criticism, there are many similar cases of critics abroad being targeted by the regime.

In the UK, the government recently decided to deport to Rwanda two former Kagame government officials who refused to work under a dictatorial regime and sought asylum in London. Those two officials are currently still fighting their cases in the court of law.

This decision was taken despite Kagame himself saying to Kenyan’s Nation newspaper: ‘When you betray the government, you betray the people of Rwanda. The fact that those people live in exile has consequences.’ He was talking about his government critics who are abroad, including his own former government officials that are going into exile.

The Rwandan government is well known for fabricating evidence against anyone who does not share the same political views. When anyone dares to criticise Kagame and his government actions, suddenly allegations of having participated in genocide, organised grenade attacks in Rwanda, or embezzlements of public funds surface and in some cases arrest warrants are issued.

In Rwanda and abroad, critics have been tortured, imprisoned, made to disappear or found dead. This has been reported and condemned by several human rights advocates such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, the UN Office of the High commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and various journalists who repeatedly reported their concerns on the lack of freedom of speech and political space in Rwanda.

On 27 January 2014, an independent UN Special Rapporteur on human rights, Maina Kiai, stated on his return from Rwanda that he observed a lack of space for individuals to express dissenting views: ‘...it appears that every dissenting political leader who rejects a consensus approach favoured by the government gets into legal trouble, with negations of the genocide, divisionism, sectarianism, and even spreading rumors being the favoured charges. In other cases, corruption charges for those who leave the RPF are preferred. And in all such cases, these politicians are accused of violence or having links with violent groups. This sends a chilling and unacceptable message that peaceful public disagreement with the government is equivalent to criminality.’ This was the case for Mr Bernard Ntaganda (leader of PS Imberakuri), Ms Victoire Ingabire (leader of FDU Inkingi) and Déogratias Mushayidi (leader of PDP-IMANZI). These trials were labelled as unfair by human rights organisations.
Many journalists who dared to criticise the Rwandan regime were convicted and imprisoned. They include Agnes Uwimana Nkusi and Saidat Mukakibi (of the Umurabyo newspaper). Others were forced to go into exile as a result of intimidation, harassment and assassination attempts. They include Jean Bosco Gasasira (Umuvugizi) and Umuseso journalists Charles Kabonero, Didas Gasana and Richard Kayigamba.

On 28 January 2014, a HRW report was published indicating that not only in Rwanda but also abroad, Rwandans expressing their criticism of the Rwandan regime are attacked or threatened. ‘As critics or opponents of the government, the victims all share a certain profile; prior to these attacks many had been threatened by individuals who were part of, or close to, the Rwandan government”. The HRW highlights cases where reliable information indicates that the victims were targeted because of their views, which differ from that of Kagame’s regime.

The long list of victims includes but is not limited to Patrick Karegeya (politician killed in January 2014, South Africa), Joel Mutabazi (illegally abducted from Uganda to Rwanda in 2013 and imprisoned in Rwanda since then), Charles Ingabire (journalist of Inyenyeri News killed in 2011 in Uganda), Agnes Ntamabyariro (illegally abducted from Zambia), Kayumba Nywamwasa (assassination attempt in 2010, South Africa), Mugenzi and Musonera (warned by the Metropolitan Police about threats to their lives from Kagame’s regime in the United Kingdom), Seth Sendashonga (former interior minister and opponent of the regime killed in 1998, in Kenya), Théoneste Lizinde and Augustin Bugirirmfura (opponents of the regime killed in 1996, in Kenya).

Even after so much international criticism, Kagame’s regime is not shy to show its position against any critics. ‘More recently, following the murder of Patrick Karegeya in South Africa in January 2014, the Rwandan president, prime minister and ministers of foreign affairs and defence all publicly used strong language, branding Karegeya as a traitor and an enemy and implying that he got what he deserved,” as reported by HRW.

I agree with Human Rights Watch in calling on governments of host countries to heighten protection of Rwandan refugees and asylum-seekers who have well-founded fears for their security in exile. The international community, through collaboration between the United Nations and national governments, should investigate thoroughly cases of attacks and threats against Rwandan government opponents and critics in their territories, and bring to justice those found to be responsible for the attacks.

States who are hosting Rwandan refugees should not extradite or deport Rwandans refugees fleeing oppression and persecution, as considering recent experiences and the Rwandan justice system’s lack of independence, they would not receive fair trials. The likelihood of being tortured and experiencing inhumane treatment is high.

This concern regarding extraditing refugees back to Rwanda was recently expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when Rwanda requested the extradition of some Rwandan refugees who had sought asylum in Uganda.

After 20 years of genocide, Rwandans live in constant fear of their government; this is clearly not only experienced by those living in Rwanda but also by those who went into exile with the hope that far way from oppressors, their lives would be safe and, more importantly, protected under international refugee protections obligations.


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Danger of criticising Rwandan government in post genocide era
Published on Pambazuka News (https://www.pambazuka.org)

Article-Summary:
20 years after the end of the genocide in Rwanda, Rwandans both at home and abroad still live in fear of their government, which goes to unimaginable lengths to hunt down and kill dissidents. The international community must band together to uphold the freedom and human rights of all Rwandans worldwide.

Category: Human Security [8]
Country: Rwanda [10]

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