

The Rwandan People deserve free and fair elections!

Africa Faith and Justice - Washington

As Rwanda prepares for presidential elections in August 2010, the truth about its political system, often characterized as one of the best in Africa, is finally being exposed. Since the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) leader and current Rwandan President Paul Kagame took power, he has been running Rwanda in an undemocratic and heavy-handed fashion. He has capitalized on the guilt following the 1994 Genocide to silence all who challenge him on good governance, social inclusion, and economic equality and human rights violations including retaliation against Hutu within Rwanda and across the border in the D.R.Congo. President Kagame has been able to hide the dark side of his regime behind key policy achievements (some of which are debatable); namely restoring order after the genocide, economic growth, development of sectors such as information technology, imposing discipline within his government, and a parliament with the majority of women (56 percent in 2008, a world record).

The days leading to Rwandan presidential elections in 2003, which saw widespread political repression and the silencing of political opponents, were no different from what is happening today. In 2003, the world stood with President Paul Kagame chose silence in the name of recovery and restoring order after the genocide. In 1994, Rwanda experienced a genocide on top of the 1959 and 1962 ethnic violence that led to many losses of life and waves of Rwanda refugees into Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name a few. Strong democracy in Rwanda with strong institutions and strong rule of law would mean taking an important step toward ending the Rwandan cycle of tribal politics that has resulted in ethnic violence. No genocide should happen again in Rwanda.

On February 18, 2010 Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton said that millions in US tax payer dollars are given every year to Rwanda in form of aid to support efforts in line with the U.S. priorities in areas of “improving governance, strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring full respect for the rule of law and human rights, promoting reconciliation and conflict resolution, and increasing long-term domestic and regional stability.” Clinton continued to say, “These priorities include building a free, credible, and transparent electoral process; advocating the expression of peaceful criticism and dissent; and enhancing freedom of the press”

On March 2, on the Senate floor, Senator Russ Feingold also raised concerns about the elections. He said: “Understandably there are real challenges to fostering democracy some 15 years after the genocide, but it is troubling that there is not more space within Rwanda for criticism and opposition voices. ...With elections looming, there are now some reports that opposition party members in Rwanda are facing increasing threats and harassment. The international community should not shy away from pushing for greater democratic space in Rwanda, which is critical for the country’s lasting stability. We fail to be true friends to the Rwandan people if we do not stand with them in the fight against renewed abuse of civil and political rights. In the next few months in the run-up to the elections, it is a key time for international donors to raise these issues with Kigali”

Join Africa Faith and Justice Network in asking the US government to consider robust measures to stop President Paul Kagame from his ongoing abuse of power;

We urge the US government to:

1. Call for a hearing on the situation in Rwanda
2. Demand a full report from the U.S Department of State of the political, social and economic situation of Rwanda since 1994 for a proper rethinking of US policy toward Rwanda.
3. Demand that President Paul Kagame creates an inclusive democratic political space and proceeds

immediately to the registration of opposition parties who have been denied registration.

4. Ask President Paul Kagame to hold free, fair, and transparent elections in August of 2010.

5. Work with the international community to ensure that independent election observers are sent to Rwanda.

6. Call for an immediate release of prisoners innocently jailed as a result of the terror campaign to prevent people from fully exercising their political rights.

7. Call for respect of human rights particularly freedom of expression and assembly.

8. Call for an immediate end to the use of violence and genocide as a tactic to silence, intimidate, arrest, imprison innocent members of the opposition.