



Rwanda: Background and Current Developments

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Summary

In 2003, Rwanda held its first multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections in decades. President Paul Kagame of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) won 95% of the votes cast, while his nearest rival, Faustin Twagiramungu, received 3.6 % of the votes cast. In the legislative elections, the ruling RPF won 73% in the 80-seat National Assembly, while the remaining seats went to RPF allies and former coalition partners. In September 2008, Rwanda held legislative elections, and the RPF won a majority of the seats. Rwandese women are now the majority in the National Assembly. In October 2008, the National Assembly elected Ms. Mukantabam Rose as the first female Speaker of the Assembly. The next presidential elections are scheduled for 2010. This report will be updated as circumstances warrant.

In Rwanda, events of a prior decade are still fresh in the minds of many survivors and perpetrators. In 1993, after several failed efforts, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government of Rwanda reached an agreement in Tanzania, referred to as the Arusha Peace Accords. The RPF joined the Rwandan government as called for in the agreement. In April 1994, the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, along with several senior government officials, were killed when their plane was shot down as it approached the capital of Rwanda, Kigali. Shortly after, the Rwandan military and a Hutu militia known as the Interhamwe began to systematically massacre Tutsis and moderate Hutu opposition members. In the first ten weeks of the Rwandan genocide, an estimated 1,000,000 people, mostly Tutsis, were slaughtered by government forces and the Interhamwe militia. In July 1994, the RPF took over power and later formed a coalition government. This report will be updated as circumstances warrant.

Contents

Rwanda: Background	1
Political Conditions	1
Human Rights Conditions	2
Economic Conditions	3
Rwanda in Congo and Regional Issues	3
Recent Developments.....	4
U.S.-Rwanda Relations	4

Contacts

Author Contact Information	5
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Rwanda: Background

Rwanda, a landlocked nation the size of Maryland, is one of the poorest in sub-Saharan Africa. The population is largely comprised of two ethnic groups, the Tutsis (about 14%), who had been the dominant political and economic force until 1961, and the majority Hutu (about 85%), who took power at independence. Shortly after independence, many Rwandese Tutsi left Rwanda and became refugees in Uganda. For decades, Rwanda suffered from periodic ethnic clashes in which hundreds of thousands died. In 1990, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched a military offensive from Uganda against government troops inside Rwanda. Government forces were able to repel the RPF and forced it to retreat into the mountains. In 1993, after several failed efforts, the RPF and the government of Rwanda reached an agreement in Tanzania, referred to as the Arusha Peace Accords.

In April 1994, the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, along with several senior government officials, were killed when their plane was shot down as it approached the capital of Rwanda, Kigali. The Rwandan military and Hutu militia soon began to systematically massacre Tutsis and moderate Hutu opposition members. In the first ten weeks of the Rwandan genocide, an estimated 1,000,000 people, mostly Tutsis, were slaughtered by government forces and the Interhamwe militia. Millions of Hutu refugees fled to neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC-then Zaire) after RPF troops took control in Kigali and ousted the Hutu government in July 1994. In 1996, most of the refugees returned home after RPF troops attacked militias and former Rwandan government troops inside Congo.

The Rwandan intervention in Congo led to the ouster of the Zairean president, Mobutu Sese Seko. Insurgent leader, Laurent Kabila, became president of the Congo with the help of the RPF-led government of Rwanda and Uganda. However, violence related to the Rwandan upheaval continued in Congo for much of the late 1990s. Rwanda is still very divided along ethnic lines, and the 1994 genocide is fresh in the minds of many survivors and perpetrators. However, resentment among the majority Hutu population toward the Tutsis appears to have decreased in part due to reconciliation efforts by the government. In 2000, the Hutu president and a leading figure of the ruling RPF, Pasteur Bizimungu, resigned in protest of "Tutsi domination" in government. But Bizimungu was not able to garner support for his cause. In April 2000, one month after President Bizimungu resigned, General Paul Kagame, who had served as defense minister and vice president since July 1994, was elected by the Rwandan legislature to the post of president.

Political Conditions

In March 2001, Rwanda held its first local elections in over 30 years. The turnout was estimated at about 90%, and the elections were monitored by 200 international observers. The United Nations Special Representative for Human Rights in Rwanda, Michel Moussali, called the elections a success despite some "technical problems." *Human Rights Watch* criticized the elections, arguing that people were forced to vote and that the elections were not transparent. Between May and August 2002, the government of Rwanda organized hundreds of meetings throughout the country to seek the input of the people of Rwanda for the draft constitution. A referendum on the draft constitution was passed in May 2003.

In August 2003, Rwanda held its first multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections in decades. President Kagame won 95% of the votes cast, while his nearest rival, Faustin Twagiramungu, received 3.6 % of the votes cast. In the legislative elections, the ruling RPF won 73% in the 80-seat National Assembly, while the remaining seats went to RPF allies and former coalition partners. Twagiramungu charged that the elections were flawed and that government officials intimidated his supporters.

The European Union Observer Mission also charged that there had been election irregularities and that intimidation of opposition candidates was widespread. However, support for President Kagame and the RPF was widespread and cut across ethnic lines.¹ Analysts note that the RPF was well organized and financed and that none of the opposition candidates had a political party base or a clear slogan. President Kagame also benefitted from key endorsements, including from all of the Hutu-dominated political parties and one of the presidential candidates, who withdrew several days before the elections. In September 2008, Rwanda held elections for the National Assembly. The RPF won the majority of the seats. Rwandese women took the majority (56.2%) of the seats and the Assembly elected the first female Speaker of Parliament in October 2008. The next presidential election is set for 2010.

The ruling RPF remains the dominant political force in the country, although there are a number of opposition parties. President Kagame remains a strong leader within the RPF, and no one has emerged within the party to challenge his leadership. A number of independents and individuals from other political parties hold key positions in government, including the posts of prime minister, internal security minister, and justice minister. Rwanda also has the largest percentage of women in parliament in the world. Women also hold key ministerial positions, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In March 2008, President Kagame implemented a major cabinet reshuffle.² Three senior ministers were reportedly demoted, several other ministers were moved to other positions, five ministries were disbanded, and three new ministries were created. In early 2008, President Kagame ordered the confiscation of land owned by senior military officers for redistribution to peasants.

Human Rights Conditions

Human rights conditions in Rwanda are poor, according to human rights groups and Rwanda experts. According to the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2007*, "significant human rights abuses occurred, although there were important improvements in some areas. Citizens' right to change their government was restricted, and extrajudicial killings by Security forces increased."³ In 2001, the Government of Rwanda began to implement a local justice system known as *Gacaca* in order to deal with the large backlog of cases from the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Tens of thousands of suspects have been released under the *Gacaca* system, and the *Gacaca* courts are expected to complete their work by the end of 2008. In March 2008, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) signed an agreement with the government

¹ Ted Dagne spent several days in August 2003 in Rwanda and met with many people, including with the presidential candidates, including Mr. Twagiramungu, President Kagame, ambassadors and observers from European Union, U.S. embassy officials and Rwandan election officials.

² The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), May 2008.

³ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>

of Rwanda to transfer some of the genocide suspects to Rwanda. In June 2008, a British court agreed to Rwanda's request for the extradition of four Rwandese accused of genocide.

On November 4, 2008, German authorities released the Secretary General of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), Callixte Mbarushimana, who was arrested in Frankfurt in July 2008. The FDLR is a group led by former Rwandan military officers and militia leaders who are accused of being the masterminds of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The State Department criticized the release of the FDLR official and blamed the group as the "root cause of instability in eastern Congo."⁴ A week after the release of the FDLR official, German authorities arrested a senior Rwandese government official, Rose Kabuye. She was arrested because a French judge had issued an arrest warrant for nine senior Rwandese leaders he accused of shooting down the plane that carried the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in 1994. Rose Kabuye was a liberation fighter with the RPF, the group that ended the 1994 genocide, and served in different government positions over the past decade, including as mayor of Kigali and personal secretary of President Kagame.⁵ The Government of Rwanda condemned the arrest and later expelled the German ambassador to Rwanda. On November 19, 2008, Kabuye was transferred to France to stand trial.

Economic Conditions

Rwanda's economy is market-based and primarily driven by the agricultural sector. More than 85% of the labor force is engaged in subsistence agriculture. In 2007, agriculture accounted 36.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 40.2% of exports.⁶ In 2008, GDP growth was 6%, and the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) forecasts a 6.3% growth for 2009 and 6.5% for 2010. The inflation rate for 2009 is expected to reach 9%. In February 2008, Rwanda's economic performance was given IMF's approval under the poverty reduction and growth facility (PRGF). The government of Rwanda has carried out a number of economic reform programs in the past several years, especially in privatization and banking. A number of government-owned companies were sold to the private sector, including Rwanda's mobile phone company.

Rwanda in Congo and Regional Issues

Insecurity in the Great Lakes region has been a major concern since the mid-1990s, although in the past year conditions have improved significantly. Relations between Rwanda and the DRC have improved in recent years, and the two countries cooperate on a wide range of issues, including on security matters. Rwanda helped facilitate dialogue between the Kabila government and some political groups in the DRC on issues related to the 2006 elections. In November 2007, the governments of the DRC and Rwanda signed an agreement in Kenya "on a common approach to end the threat posed to peace and stability" in the Great Lakes region. The parties agreed to end political and material support to armed groups in the region. The government of the DRC agreed to disarm the ex-FAR (former Rwandan Armed Forces) and Interhamwe militia and to hand over those individuals wanted by the government of Rwanda and ICTR. According to the agreement,

⁴ State Department Press Release, November 13, 2008.

⁵ CRS interview with senior Rwandan government official, November 2008.

⁶ State Department *Background Note* for Rwanda, February 2008.

those who do not wish to return to Rwanda will be placed in a camp away from the border until a solution is found.

Recent Developments

In October 2008, the forces of the National Congress for the Defense of the Congolese People (CNDP), under the command of General Laurent Nkunda, launched a major offensive against the Democratic Republic of Congo Armed Forces (FARDC) in eastern Congo. General Nkunda is considered an ally of Rwanda, and argues he is there to protect his community against the FDLR and Congolese forces. Within days, the CNDP captured a number of small towns and Congolese forces retreated in large numbers. The U.N. Mission in Congo (MONUC) also withdrew from some areas and pulled most of its forces into Goma. In late October, General Nkunda declared a unilateral cease-fire and ordered his forces to remain outside Goma. The cease-fire has been violated in recent weeks by both sides, although fighting has not spread to other parts of Congo.

The DRC government initially accused Rwanda of supporting General Nkunda, although a few days later the government seemed to back off from that position. Rwanda has consistently argued that its forces, while deployed along the Rwanda-DRC border, have not crossed into Congolese territory, a position supported by U.S. and United Nations officials.⁷ In late October, at the height of the crisis, the Congolese foreign minister paid a visit to Kigali and met with President Paul Kagame and other Rwandese leaders. At that meeting, the minister did not raise the issue of Rwanda's alleged involvement in support of Nkunda.⁸ A few days later, the Rwandese foreign minister visited Kinshasa and met with Congolese officials as well as other foreign leaders.

U.S.-Rwanda Relations

Relations between Rwanda and the United States are considered warm. In October 2007, in her testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer stated that "Rwanda has become a very reliable partner in the promotion of economic growth in Central Africa and an important contributor to African peacekeeping."⁹ In February 2008, President Bush visited Rwanda and opened the new U.S. Embassy in Kigali. In his speech, President Bush stated that "In many nations, women have exercised the right to vote and run for office. Rwanda now has the highest percentage of female legislators in the world." President Bush praised Rwanda's peacekeeping efforts in Darfur. Rwanda also is seen as an important partner in the war against terror. The Bush Administration credits Rwanda for taking a number of measures, including combating terrorist financing.

The United States provides significant assistance to Rwanda, especially in the health care sector. The United States provided \$140.4 million to Rwanda in 2007, and an estimated \$152.7 million for fiscal year 2008. The Bush Administration requested \$161.6 million for fiscal year 2009. Rwanda receives assistance under the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). Rwanda is also a focus country of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). In November 2006, Rwanda was named eligible for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) Threshold Program. In

⁷ Ted Dagne met with MONUC, Rwandese, and U.S. officials in Eastern Congo and Rwanda in August 2008.

⁸ CRS interview in late October 2008 with a senior Rwandese official in Kigali by phone.

⁹ Exploring the U.S. Role in Consolidating Peace and Democracy in the Great Lakes Region, October 2007.

October 2008, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) signed a \$24.7 million Threshold Program with Rwanda.¹⁰ The Threshold Program is expected to focus on political rights, civil liberties, and support ongoing Rwandan reform efforts.

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¹⁰ <http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases>.