

Testimony by David Himbara on Developments in Rwanda
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
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I. Background

I express my gratitude to the Chairman Christopher Smith and Ranking Member Karen Bass for the opportunity to give testimony on the troubling human rights situation in Rwanda to the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations.

My association with Rwanda, and in particular, Paul Kagame, dates back to 2000, when he became president. He invited me from South Africa, where I was working as development strategy consultant, to join his government, which I did. He made me his principal private secretary, and after two years in this position, I resigned and returned to South Africa. President Kagame persuaded me to return to Rwanda in 2006, and this time assigned me a variety of responsibilities. Between 2006 and January 2010, I held several positions in the President's office, including head of strategy, and Chairman of the Rwandan Development Board, which promotes investment, exports, and development.

By 2009, however, I had decided to leave Rwanda after witnessing a series of abuses, including physical beating of public servants by the President. I, too, became a regular victim of verbal abuse, mostly over my resistance to exaggerating Rwanda's economic growth rate. That is when I started to plot my escape from Rwanda, which I did in January 2010. I soon realized, however, that South Africa was not safe either. Death threats, attempted assassinations, and the killing of other exiled compatriots, as well as advisory warnings from South African authorities convinced me to flee South Africa. I currently live in Toronto, Canada, and work as a development strategy consultant. I am also a founding member of Democracy In Rwanda Now (DIRN), which advocates for human rights and democratic governance in Rwanda. Even in Canada, I have been advised by the authorities to be extremely cautious, and to report any suspicious signs of harassment and death threats.

II. The troubling human rights situation in Rwanda

Mr. Chairman, Rwanda's human rights abuses are well documented, including by Freedom House and the U.S. State Department's Country Report on Human Rights. Abuses of human rights in Rwanda include suppression of freedom of expression, harassment, arrest without due process, imprisonment and murder of political opponents. The State Department's Rwanda 2013 Human Rights Report best sums up the situation:

The most important human rights problems in the country remained the government's targeting of political opponents and human rights advocates for harassment, arrest, and abuse; disregard for the rule of law among security forces and the judiciary; [and] restrictions on civil liberties...Other major human rights problems included arbitrary or unlawful killings both inside and outside of the country, disappearances, torture, [and] harsh conditions in prisons and detention centers.

The March 2015 report "Rwanda - Freedom of Association and Expression" by Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office makes similar conclusions: "The UK continues to have concerns about civil and

political rights...we are deeply concerned by what appears to be a succession of acts of violence against Rwandan opposition figures."

I wish to suggest, however, that most of these reports and other writings miss the nuanced difference between Rwanda's human rights abuses up to 2012, and the abuses since then and to the present.

I highlight four differences between these two periods.

In the period up to 2012, there was a predictable pattern. In this phase, targets for human rights abuses included real or perceived political opponents as well as journalists. Examples include Victoire Ingabire, a political activist in the Rwandan diaspora who returned to Rwanda in 2010 to run against Kagame in the presidential elections. She was prevented from doing so and was subsequently imprisoned and charged with attempts against state security and espousing a genocide ideology. Another example is Déo Mushayidi, who was kidnapped from Burundi in the same year and is serving a life sentence on trumped-up charges. Andre Kagwa Rwisereka was not so lucky. His partially beheaded body was dumped on a river bank in July 2010. Rwisereka's murder came after the June 2010 killing of Jean-Léonard Rugambage, acting editor of the *Umuvugizi* newspaper. Rugambage's murder closely followed his reporting on the attempted assassination in South Africa of General Kayumba Nyamwasa, an exiled former Rwandan army chief and top critic of President Kagame. Charles Ingabire, editor of Inyenyeri News, an online publication critical of the President Kagame's government, was gunned down in Kampala, Uganda, in late 2011.

From 2012, the target of human rights abuses appears to be random, expanding into all kinds of categories:

- Théogène Turatsinze, former Managing Director of the Rwanda Development Bank, was murdered in Maputo, Mozambique, in October 2012.
- Gustave Makonene, a member of Transparency International Rwanda, was murdered in July 2013.
- Patrick Karegeya, former intelligence chief, was murdered on New Year's Day in 2014, in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Dozens of dead bodies were found in July 2014 floating in Lake Rweru, where the River Akagera enters the lake from Rwanda.
- Leading businessman Assinapol Rwigara was killed in a mysterious "accident" in Kigali, Rwanda, in February 2015.
- Dr. Emmanuel Gasakure, President Kagame's former personal physician, was killed in a police station in Kigali, Rwanda, in February 2015.

The second difference between the two phases is the attitude of the Rwandan President himself. In the latter phase the killings do not appear to bother Kagame. On the contrary, he appears to publicly condone murder, and seems to promise more killings. In reference to Patrick Karegeya's death, the President stated at the Rwandan National Prayer Breakfast in January 2014: "Anyone who betrays our cause or wishes our people ill will fall victim. What remains to be seen is how you fall victim?"

And in reaction to criticism about his human rights abuses, Kagame stated in June 2014: "Those who talk about disappearances ... we will continue to arrest more suspects and if possible shoot in broad daylight those who intend to destabilize our country."

The third difference is the atmosphere of repression in Rwanda. Since 2012, intimidation, fear and control of society by security organs has become nearly total, to the degree that Rwanda warrants description not merely as a dictatorship, but as a totalitarian state.

The fourth difference is that until 2012, the purported goal of the government was to promote the private sector. I was personally engaged in that effort, traveling around the world with President Kagame to encourage foreign investment and trade. Since 2012, Rwanda has transitioned to crony capitalism, with the ruling party dominating the economy and seizing others' private property.

III. What the U.S. Congress can do to help the Rwandan people

By holding this hearing, this Subcommittee has demonstrated leadership in addressing the unfolding nightmare in Rwanda. Let us also recall that the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Ed Royce, expressed deep concern in 2014 about assassinations and attempted assassinations of Rwandan government critics, and called for American reevaluation of its engagement with Rwanda. I humbly request this Subcommittee, and the US Congress more broadly, to build on these efforts.

For starters, Congress should seek to reverse the decision made by the Broadcasting Board of Governors to close down Voice of America's (VOA) Central Africa Branch by 2017. VOA currently broadcasts into Rwanda in the Kinyarwanda language, and therefore is the only truly independent media voice reaching the people of Rwanda, particularly now that the Rwandan government shut down BBC broadcasting services. In an environment of press censorship and repression, it would be a huge mistake for the United States to end these broadcasts and deny the Rwandan people their only source of objective news and analysis.

In addition, I urge you to take note of the evidence presented today regarding the role of the Rwandan state in organizing and carrying out assassinations of government critics beyond the country's borders. There is another name for this kind of activity: international terrorism. America has laws aimed at identifying and discouraging state sponsorship of terrorism. I encourage this Subcommittee to consider how these laws should be applied to the Rwandan state sponsored terrorism that we are witnessing today.

Finally, I encourage Congress to adopt legislation requiring not only a reevaluation of current US policy, but concrete action to put Rwanda in its proper category - a pariah state.