

RWANDA

by Filip Reyntjens

1. INTRODUCTION

Political governance has remained deeply flawed. The public domain is heavily dominated by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF); the opposition continues to be harassed and intimidated, and even physically eliminated; and the situation of human rights remains worrying, although some minor improvements are apparent in the freedoms of expression and the press. Although Rwanda remains a good performer in bureaucratic governance, increasing doubts have been expressed about the evidence base of some areas of progress, in particular in the fields of poverty and inequality, but also in health and education. Domestic issues have been compounded by regional disputes, with Rwanda having been in conflict, at one moment or another, with all four of its neighbours. This year, relations with Uganda and Burundi have been particularly problematic, thus jeopardising regional stability and integration.

2. POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

On 4 November 2019, both the government and the military leadership were thoroughly reshuffled. For the government, this had become necessary as two ministers were appointed to the Senate, and Foreign Affairs minister Richard Sezibera had not carried out his functions since early July. The fact that he hadn't been seen in public for a long time led to rumours, spread mainly by opposition sources, that he had been poisoned.¹ In the context of hostile relations between the two countries (see below), the Ugandan government spokesman issued the same claim.² Despite many questions, the government refused to communicate on the matter, which further fuelled speculation.³ Apart from the Foreign Affairs portfolio, where Vincent Biruta replaced Sezibera, new ministers and state ministers took office in the areas of environment, internal security, sports, youth and culture, and local government. The re-emergence of the Ministry of Internal Security, which had disappeared in 2016 to be

¹ E.g. "Rwandan Foreign Minister Dr Richard Sezibera Admitted in Critical Condition after Poisoning", *CommandPost*, 7 August 2019.

² "Uganda Government Spokesman Claims That Rwanda's Foreign Minister 'Poisoned'", *The Chronicles* (Kigali), 9 August 2019.

³ The only indirect reaction came on 12 August through the French weekly *Jeune Afrique*, known to be close to the regime, which confirmed that Sezibera was hospitalised in Nairobi. On 5 November, *Jeune Afrique* clarified that Sezibera had suffered a stroke.

integrated into the Justice Ministry, was striking, and may have been linked to tensions with neighbouring Uganda and Burundi, as well as with a recent increase in insurgent activities (see below). A number of high ranking officials were also replaced in several ministries. Sezibera's replacement remained an enigma, as contrary to routine practice, he was not thanked for services rendered nor did he express gratitude for the confidence placed in him.⁴ He was said to be recovering from a stroke in Israel.⁵

At the same moment, sweeping changes were announced at the army's summit. New Chiefs of Army Staff and of the Reserve Force were appointed, and incumbents were replaced in a number of positions including the Command and Staff College, the Military Academy, the Special Operations Force, the Military Police, the commands of artillery and engineering, as well as several positions in the army High Command.⁶ At the swearing in of the ministers and the army appointees a few days later, Kagame clearly linked this overhaul to security concerns. In an unscripted part of his speech, he warned that the government would "raise the cost" for those involved in acts of destabilisation. New measures, which he did not detail, would go after those "hiding behind this nonsense of freedom" to cause insecurity. Referring to "some people among us", he demanded that everyone "come clean" to reveal their side: whether they are genuinely in support of the state of affairs in the country or have a hidden agenda. To the latter, he made clear that "we will put you where you belong".⁷ The message to the political and armed opposition could not be clearer.

Kagame's remarks came a month after opposition groups launched small scale attacks in the Musanze (North) and Rusizi (West) regions in October. There was great uncertainty about the number of victims and the identity of the assailants.⁸ Earlier, in March, the National Liberation Front (FLN), presented as the military wing of the exiled *Mouvement rwandais pour le changement démocratique* (MRCD), claimed to have taken control of some parts of Nyungwe forest. However, the FLN leader "Major" Callixte Nsabimana a.k.a. Sankara was arrested on 30 April in unclear circumstances and charged with a

⁴ "Kagame names new cabinet ministers", *The New Times* (Kigali), 5 November 2019.

⁵ "Kagame Makes Changes in Cabinet and Military, PSD Party Eats Big", *The Chronicles*, 4 November 2019.

⁶ "Gen Kazura replaces Gen Nyamvumba as Kagame shakes up top military brass", *The New Times*, 5 November 2019.

⁷ "Kagame Announces New Security Crackdown", *The Chronicles*, 14 November 2019.

⁸ See e.g. "Who Could Have Conducted Latest Attack In Northwest Rwanda", *The Chronicles*, 5 October 2019; "Security Forces: Identity of Northern Rwanda Attackers Yet To Be Established", *The Chronicles*, 6 October 2019.

number of offences.⁹ Other rebel movements too were hit hard. In September, FDLR commander Sylvestre Mudacumura, wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on counts of war crimes, was killed by the Congolese army FARDC, possibly with the help of Rwandan special forces.¹⁰ In November, the commander of RUD-Urunana, an FDLR breakaway faction, was killed in similar circumstances. However, the rounding up and later transfer to Rwanda of combatants and their dependents caused serious humanitarian concern.¹¹

In reality, the regime did not wait for Kagame's message about "raising the cost" to harass and intimidate the political opposition. Detentions, killings and "disappearances" will be discussed in the section on human rights below. In May, Victoire Ingabire was interrogated by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) allegedly for holding a local meeting of her party FDU-Inkingi without authorisation. *Igihe* and *Kigali Today*, media considered close to the intelligence community, claimed that she had also recruited people to join a "terrorist organisation" and that she was looking for Hutu recruits.¹² Ingabire was again called in for questioning in October after rebel attacks in the Musanze area in which she was allegedly involved.¹³ Ingabire was also barred from leaving the country on the two occasions she asked the Justice Minister for permission.¹⁴ Her party called on the government to end the "psychological torture" practised on her.¹⁵ A few days later, Kagame lashed out at opposition groups, saying they "have no single thing of truthfulness" and calling them "greedy, liars, ungrateful and extremists".¹⁶ On the same day Kagame

⁹ He was reportedly in the Comoros prior to his arrest, but it is unclear whether he was extradited, kidnapped or otherwise intercepted on his way back to the region. Also see "Rwanda: le gouvernement confirme l'arrestation de Callixte Nsabimana, visé par un mandat d'arrêt", *Jeune Afrique*, 30 April 2019; "Why Callixte Nsabimana could face court martial", *The New Times*, 25 December 2019.

¹⁰ The involvement of Rwandan special forces was suggested by several sources close to the opposition. See e.g. LUALABA, Y., "Military Operations Against FDLR and Death of Commander Gen. Sylvestre Mudacumura: What Really Happened?", *AfroAmerica Network*, 20 September 2019.

¹¹ Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, "République démocratique du Congo: situation humanitaire critique pour des centaines de personnes suite à des opérations militaires dans le Sud-Kivu", Geneva-Kinshasa, 18 December 2019.

¹² "Rwanda: Victoire Ingabire auditionnée par le Rwanda Investigation Bureau", *Jeune Afrique*, 15 May 2019; "Rwanda : Enquête ouverte contre Victoire Ingabire", *DW*, 13 May 2019.

¹³ "Ingabire Victoire Interrogated Tuesday, Wednesday, and Continues Friday", *The Chronicles*, 10 October 2019.

¹⁴ "Rwanda opposition leader says she was barred from traveling", Kigali, AP, 6 December 2019.

¹⁵ FDU-Inkingi, "FDU-Inkingi calls on the Rwandan government to end psychological torture, degrading and inhuman treatment of its president Mrs Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza", Press release, Rouen, 15 October 2019.

¹⁶ "Kagame Calls Opposition: 'Greedy, Liars, Ungrateful and Extremists'", *The Chronicles*, 25 October 2019.

announced his “crackdown”, his party’s daily claimed that Ingabire “has not changed one iota. Terror, armed conflict, violent regime change... those remain her goals and dreams”.¹⁷ After Ingabire announced the creation of a new party, *Développement et liberté pour tous – Umurinzi*, on 9 November¹⁸, *The New Times* made clear that this made no difference: Ingabire was reportedly still “the same extremist and the same criminal”.¹⁹

In late November, Jackie Umuhoza was arrested and charged with treason and espionage, offenses that carry up to 25 years imprisonment. She is the daughter of Bishop Deo Nyirigira, formerly a prominent member of the RPF who fled to Uganda in 2001. He is accused of supporting the RNC exiled opposition group. Umuhoza’s two sisters were also detained but later released, and all three were sacked from their jobs in 2008. Their IDs and passports were confiscated. Diane Rwigara, another opponent who spent a year in jail, stated that the daughters of Nyirigira were “presumed guilty by association”.²⁰

The harassment of real or suspected opponents also continued abroad. In August 2019, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation published information about a complex web of Rwandan spies living within the suburbs and creating a culture of fear among the refugees from Rwanda. Expat and refugee Rwandans claimed that silencing critics and suppressing support for opposition parties in exile are among the top priorities of the Rwandan Government. Some spies were said to be planted in Australia as students because then visas are easier to obtain. Refugees the ABC spoke with claimed to have been threatened by various people with links to the Rwandan Government after speaking out against the regime. One of those mentioned was Guillaume Kavaruganda, Rwanda’s High Commissioner in Singapore, with responsibility also for Australia. Documents seen by the ABC stated that Kavaruganda allegedly threatened to kill a Rwandan man living in New South Wales.²¹ In October, Radio Canada related the story of a young Rwandan woman, trained in rudimentary espionage techniques in Gako military camp, who in exchange for having obtained a scholarship was instructed by the Rwandan High Commission to spy on a Rwandan couple. She said she realised the aim was to kill them, ceased

¹⁷ “Washington Times falls prey to Ingabire theatrics”, *The New Times*, 14 October 2019.

¹⁸ It is unclear why Ingabire created a new party, as there was no indication that relations with her old party had soured. Indeed, the FDU-Inkingi thanked her and her family “for the sacrifices they have endured in order to launch the party inside the country and wish(ed) her every success with her new party” (Press release, 9 November 2019).

¹⁹ “From RDR to DALFA-Umurinzi: Why Victoire Ingabire has never changed”, *The New Times*, 16 November 2019.

²⁰ “Rwanda: arrestation de la fille d’un pasteur proche de l’opposition”, *RFI*, 29 November 2019; “Rwanda accuses a pastor’s daughter of treason and espionage. Her family says the charges are fabricated”, *CNN*, 24 December 2019.

²¹ “Spies in our suburbs. Unearthing an alleged shadow network of spies and their efforts to silence dissent”, *ABC*, 25 August 2019. Also see “Rwandan spies ‘informing’ on refugee community in Australia”, *The Telegraph*, 26 August 2019.

collaborating and applied for asylum, which was refused because of her involvement in spying activities.²² Also in October, the *Financial Times* brought a story about the use of the powerful spyware Pegasus, built in Israel, to monitor conversations on WhatsApp. On the list of targeted individuals identified by WhatsApp, a considerable number were from Rwanda. The Central Africa director of Human Rights Watch stated that “the digital surveillance continues an established pattern of international intimidation”.²³ An investigation published by the Belgian daily *Le Soir* uncovered similar patterns. It found that the Rwandan regime targeted opponents and some journalists living in Belgium through hacking, surveillance and intimidation. The Belgian Justice Minister told parliament that Belgian intelligence “confirms the activities of Rwandan intelligence in Belgium aimed at weakening all that is perceived as a political threat from the opposition”.²⁴ Earlier, a detailed study of the activities of an “intervention group” co-ordinated from the Rwandan embassy in Brussels was published by *Jambonews*, an outlet close to the opposition. Based on inside sources, it mentioned operational structures, the identity of individuals involved, and practices and operations deployed by the group.²⁵

Kigali flatly denied all the allegations. President Kagame stated that his government does not use Pegasus, because it is too expensive: “Like all countries, ours uses intelligence. We have always tried to know our enemies and what they do, wherever they are (...) To be honest, I’d like to have access to this technology, but I know it is very expensive and that there are better ways to spend my money”.²⁶ With regard to the Radio Canada story, the *New Times* claimed that the young lady who was at the centre of it was framed into telling a spectacular story.²⁷ In Belgium, the Rwandan embassy did not deny the substance of the story published in *Le Soir*, but called Belgium “a central place for the regrouping of Rwandan opponents” whose “single aim is to overthrow the Rwandan government by force”. It deplored the fact that articles published in several Belgian newspapers were part of “a campaign of communication

²² “Des espions parmi nous”, *Radio Canada*, 31 October 2019.

²³ “WhatsApp hack used to snoop on 100 rights activists and dissidents”, *Financial Times*, 30 October 2019.

²⁴ “La Belgique, terrain de jeu des espions rwandais”, *Le Soir*, 22 November 2019. Strangely enough, it appeared around the same time that Belgian military intelligence signed an agreement to co-operate with Kigali in 2016. Sources in the Belgian intelligence community regretted a “dichotomy” and a “duality” (“Les renseignements militaires belges ont signé un accord confidentiel avec le Rwanda”, *Le Soir*, 7 December 2019).

²⁵ “Belgique: Les activités obscures de l’ambassade du Rwanda à Bruxelles”, *Jambonews*, 18 June 2019.

²⁶ “Paul Kagame réagit aux accusations d’espionnage de WhatsApp”, *RFI*, 9 November 2019.

²⁷ “How Canadian journalists tricked a Rwandan girl to tell a spy story – at her own expense”, *The New Times*, 2 November 2019.

orchestrated to divert attention from the terrorist activities of these groups”.²⁸

Meanwhile the regime continued to aggressively counter opinions expressed abroad that don't fit its narrative. Tired of constant accusations of genocide denial, a critical organisation in Belgium, Jambo, and a journalist of Flemish public television filed a judicial complaint for defamation, harassment, insult and other offences in January 2019.²⁹ In February, the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (CNLG) issued an aggressive communiqué denouncing a conference organised in Brussels by the *Institut Seth Sendashonga*. It was presented as a “forum of genocide deniers” whose organisers needed to be “unmasked”.³⁰ Academic institutions were not spared. Nearly everywhere a lecture or conference was organised that didn't seem to fit the official narrative, the Rwandan embassy or groups sympathetic to the government intervened to attack it or prevent it from taking place, e.g. in Rochester NY and Hurst, Texas in the US³¹, The Hague in The Netherlands³², or at Flemish universities in Belgium.³³ After Kenyan Professor Makau Mutua (SUNY Buffalo Law School) published an article critical of Kagame³⁴, he was viciously attacked in the government press.³⁵ In June, the “Umurinzi Support Fund” was set up in Kigali in order to “support activities such as following up and suing people whose acts meant for [sic] negating or denying the genocide especially those using social media platforms and the mainstream media”.³⁶ The regime also continued to actively protect and promote its official histori-

²⁸ “Le Rwanda déplore que la presse belge fasse l'écho d'une campagne visant à le déstabiliser”, Press release 27 November 2019.

²⁹ “Des Rwandais dénoncent ‘l'apartheid de la mémoire’”, *Le Vif*, 29 January 2019.

³⁰ “La Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le Génocide dénonce l'organisation en Belgique d'une conférence négationniste par l'Institut Seth Sendashonga”, Press release 22 February 2019; also see “Editorial: When will Genocide deniers get back to reality?”, *The New Times*, 23 February 2019.

³¹ “Editorial: Genocide deniers must be exposed wherever they are”, *The New Times*, 1 April 2019; “Genocide deniers at U.S. varsities”, *The New Times*, 31 March 2019.

³² Email dated 3 May 2019 from Ambassador Karabaranga to Professor Gewald, director of the African Studies Centre.

³³ “European universities called out for giving platform to Genocide denier”, *The New Times*, 10 October 2019.

³⁴ “Love him or hate him, Kagame could be Africa's Lee Kuan Yew”, *The Standard* (Nairobi), 24 February 2019.

³⁵ “Black skin, white mask: the metaphor of Makau Mutua”, *The New Times*, 26 February 2019; “Makau Mutua proves he's unfit for President”, *The New Times*, 28 February 2019; “No qualms needed over Rwanda's democratic dispensation”, *The New Times*, 17 May 2019.

³⁶ “New fund to fight people negating, denying genocide launched”, *The New Times*, 8 June 2019. Later in the year, senators insisted on expediting plans for the setting up of a “national centre of excellence on genocide studies” to bolster the fight against genocide ideology and denial in Rwanda and abroad (“Senators want think tank on genocide studies expedited”, *The New Times*, 20 December 2019).

cal narrative.³⁷

Concerning political governance, international rankings offer up a rather gloomy picture. The Economist's *Democracy Index 2018* places Rwanda 128th worldwide out of a total of 167. In the Bertelsmann's *Transformation Index* (BTI) it is classified among the "hard-line autocracies". Freedom House considers it as "not free". It is not surprising under these circumstances that influential international media have become increasingly worried about the regime's credentials.³⁸ Just like in the past, the contradictions between bureaucratic and political governance have been highlighted.³⁹ Despite these opinions in the media and scholarship that overall tends to be highly critical, one author has found it possible to propose a positive spin to the country's democratic performance.⁴⁰

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

Rwanda has continued to display good technocratic governance inspired by vision and ambition. Real GDP growth was 8.6 per cent in 2018, and expected to remain at around 7 per cent during the coming years. Standard & Poor's upgraded its rating from "B" to "B+", and assigned a stable outlook.⁴¹ In mid-2019, some important new investments were announced. In May, a five-year agreement was signed with Motorola Solutions to build ICT capacity, with the aim of establishing the company's regional headquarters in Rwanda and to create a regional hub.⁴² A few days later, a partnership deal was signed with a Chinese garment firm to set up a factory in Kigali, expected to employ thousands of workers.⁴³ In June, Rwanda's first gold refinery, with a capacity of six tonnes per month, was commissioned in the Kigali Special Economic

³⁷ "1,800 History Teachers Undergo Refresher Course on Official History Narrative", *The Chronicles*, 30 December 2019. The reference to the "official history narrative" was immediately attacked on social media posts supportive of the government.

³⁸ A few examples: "Rwanda and CHOGM 2020", *The Round Table. The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 15 February 2019; "We're just one happy family now, aren't we?", *The Economist*, 30 March 2019; "Rwanda-France. Kagame, cet incontournable peu fréquentable", *L'Humanité Dimanche*, 4-10 April 2019; "It's time for reckoning for Kagame and his Western cheerleaders", *Mail & Guardian*, 23 April 2019; "Is Rwanda's Paul Kagame a Strongman, a Technocrat, or Something in Between?", *Time*, 8 July 2019; "Brutal from the Beginning. The truth about everyone's favorite strongman", *Harper's Magazine*, 23 July 2019.

³⁹ See for instance KEFFLER, N., "Economic growth in Rwanda has arguably come at the cost of democratic freedom", *World Finance*, 17 December 2019.

⁴⁰ GOLOOBA-MUTEBI, F., "Rwanda under Kagame: Political Leadership and Developmentalism", in CARBONE, G. (Ed.), *Leaders for a New Africa. Democrats, Autocrats, and Development*, Milano, ISPI, 2019, pp. 118-144.

⁴¹ Standard & Poor's, "Rwanda Upgraded To 'B+' On Strong Economic Prospects; Outlook Stable", 9 August 2019.

⁴² Rwanda Development Board, "Government of Rwanda signs 5-year deal with Motorola Solutions", Press release 10 May 2019.

⁴³ "Chinese garment firm to create 7,500 jobs in Rwanda", *The New Times*, 12 May 2019.

Zone.⁴⁴ The Kigali Arena, a 10,000 seat state of the art indoor sports stadium costing \$104 million, was inaugurated in August.⁴⁵ In November, an agreement was signed with Russia for the construction of a nuclear research facility and power plant by 2024.⁴⁶ Similar deals were signed by Rosatom with many African countries, raising concerns that they could be unable to afford the high capital costs involved in nuclear power production. Rwandan state minister Nduhugirehe “would not be drawn on the cost and affordability implications”.⁴⁷

Not much had been heard about progress with the construction work at the new Bugesera airport, except the announcement in March that it had temporarily halted to allow the redesign of the facility.⁴⁸ After a lot of speculations, on 9 December three agreements were signed with Qatar Airways setting up a joint venture to build, own, and operate the airport. The new plans are very ambitious. Against the previous capacity of 1.7 million passengers in the first phase, the airport now has a target capacity of 7 million passengers annually in the first phase and 14 million in the second. The ambition is to turn the airport into a regional hub. The increased capacity and new design have driven up the cost of the facility to about \$1.3 billion for the two phases, compared to around \$825 million for the earlier project. The complete infrastructure is expected to be operational by 2032, but precise dates for phases one and two were not given.⁴⁹ Over the last few years, the relations between Rwanda and Qatar have deepened considerably. Kagame was in Qatar in November 2018, several bilateral investment treaties were signed between the two countries, and the Emir of Qatar visited Rwanda in April and again in December (also see below).⁵⁰

However, some projects were far off track. For instance, the Volkswagen assembly facility, launched with great fanfare in June 2018 (see last year’s chronicle) with a target to produce about 1,000 cars annually, had assembled only 55 vehicles by March 2019.⁵¹ A German daily could only see “a few men” (“ein paar Männer”) working in the plant, and the CEO of Volkswagen

⁴⁴ “Rwanda gets first gold refinery”, *The New Times*, 19 June 2019.

⁴⁵ “Kigali Arena Cost \$104m, Contractor’s Financial Report Shows”, *The Chronicles*, 24 August 2019.

⁴⁶ “Russia to set up nuclear power plants in Rwanda”, *TRTWorld*, 23 October 2019.

⁴⁷ FABRICIUS, P., “African countries rush to sign nuclear deals with Russia”, *Daily Maverick*, 29 October 2019.

⁴⁸ “Bugesera International Airport under redesign”, *The New Times*, 20 March 2019.

⁴⁹ “Ten things we know about the Rwanda-Qatar Airways deal”, *The New Times*, 10 December 2019.

⁵⁰ It is probably no coincidence that Rwanda signed a sponsor deal with French top soccer club Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), which is owned by Qatar, just days before the one on Bugesera airport. The deal is reminiscent of a similar one struck with Arsenal in 2018. See below for more on Qatar-Rwanda relations.

⁵¹ “Volkswagen Rwanda assembles 55 vehicles”, *The New Times*, 4 March 2010.

South Africa said that “in the long run the market is too small”.⁵² In February, US companies sued Rwanda at the investments dispute centre ICSID, seeking compensation of \$95 million for the seizure of their mining concessions that were subsequently awarded to an Oman-based company.⁵³ While Rwanda has proved very successful in attracting MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, exhibitions) tourism, even becoming Africa’s 2nd most popular conference destination⁵⁴, this development has come at a considerable cost. Year after year, the national carrier RwandAir runs operational deficits in excess of \$50 million, in addition to loans contracted for investing in an ever-expanding fleet, and the occupancy rate of hotels in Kigali is a mere 49%, far below the profitability threshold of 70%.⁵⁵

Rwanda’s statistics, particularly those on poverty, have been criticised during the last few years, and they remain under intense scrutiny. An analysis of the latest household survey (EICV5) showed an increase in poverty of between 8.3 and 9.6 percentage points between 2014 (EICV4) and 2018.⁵⁶ This came on top of the (at least) 5-7 percentage point increase that had already occurred between 2010 and 2014. The anonymous authors also observed that the gap between final household consumption used in the official GDP figure, and the one estimated from the household survey, has continued to grow, thus casting doubt on the reliability of official GDP statistics.⁵⁷ A subsequent blog-post found that “even when we use NISR’s (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda) own price index, NISR’s own consumption aggregates, NISR’s own poverty line, and even the lowest available inflation rate (...), we still find a sharp increase in poverty between 2011 and 2014, and a net increase in poverty between 2011 and 2017”. What the authors found “most shocking of all” was “that our review of the facts clearly shows that the World Bank *was aware of this discrepancy*, but chose to ignore it and to work around it to ‘prove’ the validity of NISR’s results”. They called “the World Bank’s complicity in manipulating and misreporting official statistics in Rwanda” a “scandal” for which those responsible should be held accountable.⁵⁸ Professor Martin Ravallion, a former director of the Bank’s research department, called

⁵² “Ruandas Revival”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 April 2019.

⁵³ “US investors demand \$96m for loss of Rwanda contracts”, *The East African*, 10 February 2019.

⁵⁴ “Kigali ranked Africa’s 2nd most popular conference destination”, *The New Times*, 16 May 2019.

⁵⁵ “Rwanda: Kigali, la destination d’affaires qui monte”, *Jeune Afrique*, 4 July 2019.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, even on the basis of the controversial official figures, parliament summoned government ministers over the slow poverty reduction, said to be “dismal”, observed between 2014 and 2017 (“Ministers to be summoned to parliament over slow progress in poverty reduction”, *The New Times*, 2 March 2019). As seen, the reduction was in fact an increase.

⁵⁷ “Revealing Lies, Questioning Complicity”, *ROAPE* blog, 29 January 2019.

⁵⁸ “A Straightforward Case of Fake Statistics”, *ROAPE* blog, 18 April 2019, italics in the original.

the accusations “serious” and said: “WB needs to respond (again)” (Twitter @MartinRavallion 20 April 2019). The Bank tried two days later: “While noting that an inconsistency between two measures of inflation requires further research”⁵⁹, it nevertheless had “not found any clear signs of errors or manipulations”.⁶⁰

The *Financial Times* followed up a few months later. Four academics it contacted said “it looked like a low estimation of price rises had been used to skew the results and imply a reduction in poverty that did not exist”. In 2015, five World Bank staff sounded the alarm in a letter to the Bank’s leadership, signalling their concern over what they called “the manipulation of official statistics and failure to provide reliable data openly”.⁶¹ Without going into substance, Kagame lambasted the *Financial Times* story as “western propaganda”.⁶² However, the next day, *The Economist* too asked awkward questions about Rwanda’s poverty and GDP statistics, and concluded that “at stake is Mr Kagame’s reputation, and that of the development model he embodies”.⁶³ In what almost looked like a conspiracy, the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on the same day relayed the *Financial Times* story.⁶⁴ The World Bank felt compelled to again react, and it did so in the same inept way as previously: it did not address the substance of the criticism, and basically said that they and NISR had done things the right way.⁶⁵ Ravallion again expressed disappointment: “Not a satisfactory response from World Bank on the controversy over Rwanda’s poverty numbers. (...) I would hope the Bank could do better” (Twitter @MartinRavallion 19 August 2019).⁶⁶

While this debate was raging, Ansoms however noted that the govern-

⁵⁹ The issue of deflators is however at the core of this debate.

⁶⁰ World Bank, “Q&A on Rwanda Poverty Statistics”, Factsheet 22 April 2019.

⁶¹ “Rwanda: where even poverty data must toe Kagame’s line”, *Financial Times*, 13 August 2019.

⁶² “Kagame Addresses ‘Fake Poverty Data’ Allegations”, *The Chronicles*, 14 August 2019. *The Chronicles* noted courageously and with irony that “while government officials are quick to denounce western media (...), they are also (...) always willing and happy to celebrate those figures that hail the country’s achievements and, at the same time, willingly welcome western storytellers and give them unfettered access and interviews that local journalists can only dream of” (“The Story Behind ‘Fake’ Poverty Data and Gov’t’s Tango With Western Storytellers”, *The Chronicles*, 20 August 2019).

⁶³ “Has Rwanda been fiddling its numbers?”, *The Economist*, 15 August 2019.

⁶⁴ “Rwanda will das ‘SingapurAfrikas’ sein – und trickst dafür offenbar bei der Armutsstatistik”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 15 August 2019.

⁶⁵ World Bank, “World Bank Statement on Rwanda Statistics”, 16 August 2019. However, two months earlier the Bank found that “Rwanda’s poverty rate is still higher, and its growth elasticity of poverty reduction lower, than in many comparable countries in the region” (World Bank, *Rwanda. Systematic Country Diagnostic*, 25 June 2019).

⁶⁶ For its part, the Rwandan side was happy with the Bank’s reaction, as it “debunked malicious statements circulated by Financial Times and recycled by all sorts of Rwanda haters and dissidents” (“Editorial: At the end of the day Rwanda got the last laugh”, *The New Times*, 18 August 2019).

ment was becoming more open to discussing problematic aspects of rural and agricultural policies. While she too notes an increase in poverty and the manipulation of figures, she also observes that lessons are learned, for instance when farmers were given more freedom to produce crops for self-sufficiency, and when the rigid imposition of mono-cropping was moderated. However, taboos persist. Criticism is required to be “constructive”, meaning “not calling into question the overall good intentions of national policy makers”. It also remains taboo to “tackle the fundamental power imbalances embedded within the new agrarian model – particularly when it comes to the abuse of power by elites with political or military connections”.⁶⁷

Disregard for the poor also came to the fore when thousands of people were forced from their homes in poor Kigali neighbourhoods in December. Officially, the evictions and demolitions occurred because of potential flooding and landslides⁶⁸, but the fast and heavy-handed ways of vacating these areas raised concerns, as did the lack of effective compensation – leaving entire families literally in the rain and the cold.⁶⁹ Some interpreted this as a move to “clean up” Kigali in view of the Commonwealth Summit due to take place there in June 2020.⁷⁰ More generally, critics said this was the price paid by the poor for Kigali’s modernist transformation. However, pockets of resistance emerged, as many people refused to move, while others vowed to take the matter to court.⁷¹

Finally, serious concerns remained with regard to education and health. Problems in the education sector were discussed during the March National Leadership retreat. Some of the issues included low completion rates, poor learning outcomes, and inadequate skills levels among teachers. Only 68 per cent of first graders were expected to complete six years of primary education.⁷² Likewise, *Kigali Today*, an outlet close to the regime, sounded the alarm. In the Northern province, 47 per cent of pupils leaving primary school were unable to read or write.⁷³ Problems included the imposition of English

⁶⁷ ANSOMS, A., “Expanding the Space for Criticism in Rwanda”, *ROAPE* blog, 12 March 2019.

⁶⁸ As elsewhere in East Africa there were exceptionally heavy rains at the time.

⁶⁹ “Kigali Demolitions Turning People Into Refugees In a Peaceful Country – Green Party”, *The Chronicles*, 18 December 2019.

⁷⁰ FDU-Inkingi, “Poor neighbourhoods in Rwandan capital Kigali raised to the ground as part of a cleaning up exercise for Commonwealth Summit”, Rouen, 18 December 2019.

⁷¹ “Rwanda’s grand vision for future leaves poor on the curb”, *The East African*, 27 December 2019.

⁷² “Gov’t retreat agenda to focus on transformation, accountability”, *The New Times*, 5 March 2019.

⁷³ “Amajyaruguru: Abana 47% barangiza amashuri abanza batazi neza gusoma no kwandika”, *Kigali Today*, 23 March 2019.

as language of instruction⁷⁴, overfilled classrooms, pitiful teachers' pay, and the effects of performance contracts (*imihigo*) that lead to cheating on success rates. The consequence is a two-tier education system, where the gap between private education for the elite and public education for the vast majority of Rwandans keeps widening.⁷⁵ These concerns are shared by the World Bank, which found that education-related indicators put Rwanda in the bottom 25 per cent of countries globally. Less than half of teachers are at the “intermediate level” in English. Only 8 per cent of tertiary-age young people are enrolled in tertiary education.⁷⁶

With regard to health, an IMF study found that there is little or no evidence that the Rwandan Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI) programme, known as *Mutuelle de santé*, has succeeded in providing affordable health insurance for the poor.⁷⁷ Research carried out by *The Chronicles* observed poor functioning of health centres, inadequate healthcare, financial bottlenecks, management problems, and unequal treatment of patients.⁷⁸

4. JUSTICE

Only a handful of judicial events are to be noted during the year under review. Opponent Diane Rwigara and her mother were acquitted in December 2018 on charges of inciting insurrection and forgery, but the prosecution appealed the judgment. However, on injunction from the Justice Minister, the appeal was withdrawn, thus ending this case. Minister Busingye said that “what the court acknowledged already is enough in the circumstances. There are better uses for public resources than pursuing this case in appeal”.⁷⁹ The Minister did not have much of a choice, and he may well have anticipated an opinion adopted in June by the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. It held that the arrest and detention of the Rwigaras was arbitrary and that their trial was unfair. It also considered that they were entitled to compensation and other reparations, urged the government to ensure a full and independent investigation, and to take appropriate measures

⁷⁴ On the issue of unrealistic and inconsistent language policies, see “Schools Will Continue To Teach in English Not Kinyarwanda”, *The Chronicles*, 2 December 2019; “How CHOGM2020 Pushed Gov't To Re-embrace English As Language of Instruction In Schools”, *The Chronicles*, 3 December 2019.

⁷⁵ An interesting (and sobering) overview is offered by MUSABYIMANA, G., “Rwanda. Halte au génocide intellectuel”, *Musabyimana.net*, 26 August 2019.

⁷⁶ World Bank, *Rwanda. Systematic Country Diagnostic*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ WOLDEMICHAEL, A., GURARA, D. and SHIMELES, A., “The Impact of Community Based Health Insurance Schemes on Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Spending: Evidence from Rwanda”, IMF Working Paper 19/38, February 2019. Also see “Rwanda's Health Insurance Scheme Favours the Rich – Says IMF Study”, *The Chronicles*, 4 March 2019.

⁷⁸ “Mutuelle de santé: A Troubled Health Insurance Scheme”, *The Chronicles*, 23 October 2019.

⁷⁹ “Prosecution withdraws Rwigara appeal case”, *The New Times*, 9 January 2019.

against those responsible for the violation of their rights.⁸⁰ Like the conditional release of Victoire Ingabire in 2018 after the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights condemned Rwanda a year earlier, the acquittal of the Rwigaras could well mean that international oversight has an impact on the observance of the rule of law.

The case against nine members of the UDF-Inkingi, who were arrested in September 2017, has continued.⁸¹ While the defence asked the court to dismiss the charges because confessions were obtained through torture, the prosecutor required a twelve-year sentence for a single charge of conspiracy to commit terrorism.⁸² The trial was ongoing at the time of writing. During the appeal against the life sentence pronounced by the Military High Court in 2014⁸³, former Presidential Guard Lt. Joel Mutabazi sought bail, claiming poor health as a result of mistreatment in prison.⁸⁴ However, on 22 November, the Court of Appeal confirmed the sentence.⁸⁵ Also on appeal, Col. Tom Byabagamba and Brig. Gen. Frank Rusagara, sentenced to lengthy jail terms by the Military High Court in 2016 for offences related to insurrection, applied for bail citing ill health.⁸⁶ Family members living in the UK⁸⁷ and six British lawmakers called for their release, an appeal seen as an attempt to “put pressure on the Rwandan government to exonerate crimes committed by Rwandan citizens”.⁸⁸ On 27 December, both men were sentenced to 15 years in jail and

⁸⁰ Human Rights Council, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, *Opinion No. 24/2019 concerning Diane Shima Rwigara and Adeline Rwigara (Rwanda)*, 13 June 2019.

⁸¹ The tenth co-accused, the FDU-Inkingi's first vice-president, “disappeared” in October 2018 while he was detained in Mpanga prison.

⁸² “State Seeks 12 Year Jail Term for FDU Inkingi Party Members in Lengthy Trial”, *The Chronicles*, 7 November 2019.

⁸³ He was found guilty on eight counts including a plot to assassinate the president, terrorism, treason, setting up an armed group, spreading rumours with the intention of inciting the public against the state, murder and the illegal possession of a firearm.

⁸⁴ “Ex-Presidential Guard Joel Mutabazi Claims To Be Going Blind, Starving and Sick With Hepatitis”, *The Chronicles*, 11 June 2019; “Lt. Mutabazi seeks bail from Court of Appeal”, *The New Times*, 12 June 2019.

⁸⁵ “Appeals Court Maintains Life Sentence for Former Presidential Bodyguard Mutabazi”, *The Chronicles*, 23 November 2019.

⁸⁶ “Byabagamba, Rusagara petition Court of Appeal, seek bail”, *The New Times*, 23 May 2019.

⁸⁷ “Press release: Fifth anniversary of the illegal detention of our father, Frank Kanyambo Rusagara”, 12 August 2019, signed by Rusagara's daughter Veronica Shandari. Also see SHANDARI, V., “Rwanda – the country where a private conversation can cost you your freedom”, *The Telegraph*, 7 November 2019.

⁸⁸ “Warped personal opinions vs 25 years of rebuilding Rwanda's justice system”, *The New Times*, 12 November 2019. Also see “Rwanda responds to British lawmakers”, *The New Times*, 6 November 2016; “British lawmakers don't make laws in Rwanda”, *The New Times*, 6 November 2019; “UK MPs Complicating Byabagamba-Rusagara Appeals Case, Kagame Warns”, *The Chronicles*, 8 November 2019.

stripped of their military ranks.⁸⁹

In South Africa, the case related to the murder of former Rwandan intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya on New Year's Day 2014 had seemingly been dormant for several years. However, in September, South African prosecutors informed Karegeya's family that they had issued arrest warrants for Ismael Gafaranga and Alex Sugira, believed to be living in Rwanda. The police and prosecutors had earlier stated that there were "close links" between the Rwandan government and the suspects. Although it is highly unlikely that Rwanda will extradite the men, relatives saw the case as an opportunity to expose a pattern of targeted extrajudicial killings carried out by the Kigali regime.⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch stated that "If the government truly has nothing to hide, it should cooperate with South African judicial authorities and ensure the accused face justice".⁹¹

In July, the condemnation by the ICC of Congolese warlord Bosco Ntaganda on 18 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the DRC's Ituri region showed many links with Rwanda. Ntaganda was born in Rwanda, and fought with the RPF during the Rwandan civil war, participated with the Rwandan army in the first Congo war, and later joined several Rwanda-backed Congolese rebel movements. The judgment mentions Rwanda several times as supplying, arming and training rebel groups led by Ntaganda.⁹² The RPF is written all over Ntaganda's timeline provided by Human Rights Watch⁹³, yet Rwanda escaped explicit condemnation. This was regretted by civil society organisations and analysts. One of them said that "states that could have been implicated, such as Rwanda and the DRC, did not have to respond before the court".⁹⁴

The relations of Rwanda with the residual mechanism for international criminal tribunals MICT, that were hostile during the past years, are set to improve. Its new President, Judge Agius Carmel (Malta), vowed to consider the opinion of the Rwandan government and the genocide survivors before deciding on early releases of convicts, an issue that had been contentious under his

⁸⁹ "Family In Tears As 2 Former Top Military Officers Get New Long Jail Sentences", *The Chronicles*, 28 December 2019.

⁹⁰ "South Africa asks Rwanda to hand over Karegeya murder suspects", *The Guardian*, 9 September 2019; "South Africa seeks arrest of murder suspects with alleged links to Rwandan government", *The Globe and Mail*, 9 September 2019.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch, "Rwandans Charged With Murder of Exiled Critic", 13 September 2019.

⁹² International Criminal Court, Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the case of *The Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda*, Judgment of 8 July 2019, ICC-01/04-02/06.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch, "ICC: Congo Warlord Guilty of Crimes Against Humanity", 8 July 2019.

⁹⁴ "Réactions en demi-teinte en RDC après la condamnation de l'ex-rebelle Bosco Ntaganda", *Jeune Afrique*, 9 July 2019.

predecessor Theodore Meron.⁹⁵ For his part, Prosecutor Serge Brammertz said that his office had credible intelligence on the whereabouts of several of the eight fugitives indicted by the ICTR. However, he mentioned “issues in state cooperation” standing in the way of securing arrests, without however naming the countries in question.⁹⁶

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

This is how the US Department of State summarised its concerns on human rights practices in Rwanda: “Human rights issues included reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings by state security forces; forced disappearance by state security forces; torture by state security forces including asphyxiation, electric shocks, mock executions; arbitrary detention by state security forces; political prisoners; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; threats to and violence against journalists, censorship, website blocking, and criminal libel; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, such as overly restrictive nongovernmental organization (NGO) laws; and restrictions on political participation”.⁹⁷ This dim view is shared by international organisations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders.

The right to life remained a major concern. Opposition movements, and in particular the unregistered opposition party FDU-Inkingi, have paid a heavy price. Arrests, killings and “disappearances” observed during the last years have continued throughout 2019. In May, FDU-Inkingi leader Ingabire’s personal assistant was found murdered by strangulation in a remote part of the country. Calls for justice by Ingabire were not heeded.⁹⁸ After a journalist and another FDU-Inkingi leader “disappeared” in mid-July, international media took notice and observed a worrying trend.⁹⁹ After Human Rights Watch demanded investigations¹⁰⁰, it was accused of engaging in a “coordinated, concerted fraudulent global venture” against the country.¹⁰¹ In September, after the FDU-Inkingi national coordinator was stabbed to death at his workplace,

⁹⁵ “New MICT President keen to mend relations”, *The New Times*, 2 April 2019.

⁹⁶ “UN prosecutor: We have intelligence on whereabouts of key genocide fugitives”, *The New Times*, 19 July 2019.

⁹⁷ US Department of State, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 13 March 2019, entry on Rwanda.

⁹⁸ “Rwanda opposition calls for justice following death of party’s spokesperson”, *The East African*, 11 March 2019; Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Opposition politician found dead”, 18 March 2019.

⁹⁹ “Opposition members keep going ‘missing’ in Rwanda. Few expect them to return”, *CNN*, 27 July 2019; “Rwanda’s disappearing opposition”, *Deutsche Welle*, 5 August 2019; “Gefährlicher Kampf”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 August 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Rwanda: Disappearances Require Credible Investigations*, 15 August 2019.

¹⁰¹ “Human Rights Watch; the speck in its eye”, *The New Times*, 21 August 2019.

Human Rights Watch asked the international community to call for credible investigations.¹⁰² Ingabire said her party official had been killed by “trained assassins”, not by ordinary criminals.¹⁰³

In mid-July, opposition figure Diane Rwigara wrote a daring open letter to President Kagame, denouncing killings of genocide survivors. The occasion was a particular killing, but she added a list of 42 people murdered or “disappeared” since the genocide.¹⁰⁴ The CNLG called Rwigara’s accusations an “attempt to trivialise the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi”, and even tantamount to denial of the genocide, “a crime punishable by law”.¹⁰⁵ The feeling that Tutsi survivors were targeted by the regime was relayed in a letter sent to Kagame by 28 diaspora survivors who came out in support of Rwigara. The reason was that she had been attacked by leaders of the CNLG and Ibuka in articles published on *Igih.com*, an outlet considered close to the intelligence services. As some of these statements claimed that there were “bad survivors who are worse than the *génocidaires* themselves”, the signatories begged Kagame to help them “not to be asked to carry the burden of divisions among survivors and the responsibility of being the actors and accomplices of the terrible crime of genocide we have suffered”.¹⁰⁶

Although the Reporters without Borders’ 2019 World Press Freedom Index ranked Rwanda 155th out of a total of 180 countries in the “bad” category, some improvements in the areas of freedom of expression and the press did seem to have been made. There has been increasing debate on a large range of issues like local-level politics, education, the usefulness of *imihigo* performance contracts, rural and agricultural policies (see above), corruption, the language of instruction in schools, the demolition of houses in flood-prone areas, and the need to maintain a senate. Contrary to the official *The New Times*, the web-based *The Chronicles* has become more outspoken, and on occasion criticises government policies. Christopher Kayumba, its senior writer who also teaches at the University of Rwanda, speaks his mind on social media. For instance, he wrote on Twitter that “#Rwanda’s major challenge

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch, *Rwanda: Killing Is Latest Attack on Opponents*, 24 September 2019. Also see “Rwandan opposition official stabbed to death in latest in wave of killings”, *The Globe and Mail*, 24 September 2019; “Rwanda’s opposition rattled by killings and disappearances of members”, *Deutsche Welle*, 26 September 2019.

¹⁰³ “Ingabire Victoire Says Her Party Official Killed By ‘Trained Assassins’”, *The Chronicles*, 25 September 2019.

¹⁰⁴ People Salvation Movement – Itabaza, “Open Letter to President Paul Kagame”, Kigali, 15 July 2019. In a P.S. Rwigara added: “I will probably face grave acts of reprisal for writing this letter”. However, at the time of writing, no such reprisals seem to have occurred.

¹⁰⁵ “CNLG Dismisses Rwigara Allegations, Tantamount to Denial”, *Kigali Today*, 16 July 2019.

¹⁰⁶ “Porter à votre attention notre inquiétude face aux divisions semées entre les rescapés du génocide contre les Tutsi et aux préjugés qui les accompagnent”, Letter to President Kagame, 3 August 2019.

today is how to differentiate criminality & legitimate opposition to current policies. Anyone who criticizes govt is branded a criminal. That's dangerous & unhelpful" (@Ckayumba 28 October 2019). On another occasion, he wrote that "What's common in most 'post-liberated' countries on the continent is the blinding sense of entitlement for veterans and generals of the liberation; the brutal treatment of the opposition; punishing dissent; and ownership of the economy by a few families directly connected to winners of the war".¹⁰⁷ He didn't mention Rwanda explicitly, but this could have applied there, and it would seem that *The Chronicles* and Kayumba – like Rwigara – are exploring the limits of what can be said.¹⁰⁸

There were other signs of improvements in the media environment. In April, the Supreme Court ruled against provisions of a 2018 law that criminalised "humiliation" of public authorities, which it considered contrary to freedoms of expression and the press guaranteed by the constitution. The court, however, maintained the criminal nature of insults or defamation against the President.¹⁰⁹ Kagame reacted immediately, stating that, while respecting the court's decision, he took issue with it, his position having always been "that this should be a civil not a criminal matter".¹¹⁰ However, Fred Muvunyi, a former chairman of the Rwanda Media Commission now living in exile in Germany, was not convinced: "There's just one problem: I don't believe him (Kagame) (...) Despite some of his reconciliatory rhetoric, Kagame is still feared across the country. (...) The dangers faced by critics highlight a grim reality: Rwanda offers little room for dissent".¹¹¹ Nevertheless, six months later, the Justice Minister instructed the General Prosecutor to drop charges against a radio and TV journalist prosecuted over content published in a YouTube video deemed obscene. For Minister Busingye, this wasn't a prosecutable case "since it concerns subjective morality and the state doesn't police morality".¹¹²

Being active on social media in the fields of politics is quite another matter. In October, radio *Itahuka* relayed the interpretation given by the Informa-

¹⁰⁷ "Africa Should Rethink Liberators Away From Chasing Colonialists To Ending Underdevelopment", *The Chronicles*, 9 September 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Kayumba was arrested on 10 December 2019, but this seemed to have been linked to an incident where he disturbed the peace at Kigali airport rather than to political reasons.

¹⁰⁹ "Journalists laud Supreme Court landmark ruling on defamation", *The New Times*, 25 April 2019.

¹¹⁰ "Statement on Decision of the Supreme Court", Kigali, 25 April 2019. Also see "Kagame wants no special legal protection from defamation", *The New Times*, 27 April 2019.

¹¹¹ MUVUNYI, F., "Rwanda's strongman finally says the right thing on free speech. Does he mean it?", *The Washington Post*, 1 May 2019. In the same vein: MUVUNYI, F., "Opinion: Rwanda's Paul Kagame – an enemy of the media parading as a statesman", *Deutsche Welle*, 2 May 2019.

¹¹² "Justice Minister Instructs Prosecutor-General To Drop Charges Against Journalist Mulindahabi", *The Chronicles*, 20 September 2019.

tion and Communication Ministry to a 2018 law on cyber criminality. Sharing or liking videos or posts of “terrorist groups” is akin to “using” such sites, and is therefore a criminal offence. The Senate blacklisted 24 online radio stations, websites and blogs accused of promoting genocide denial. Visiting those accounts is punishable by long prison sentences. Even private emails can be costly, as German ambassador Peter Woeste found out to his cost. After he expressed critical views of the government in an email, the German government was requested to recall him, which it did.¹¹³ Neither government offered explanations, and it was unclear how the Rwandans had accessed the email’s contents.

The RPF’s human rights record before, during and after the genocide, in both Rwanda and the DRC, has remained the subject of controversy and came to the fore again with the publication of Canadian journalist Judi Rever’s book *In Praise of Blood* (see last year’s chronicle). While recognising the scale of the atrocities committed by the RPF, several Rwanda scholars take issue with her claim that these constituted genocide. For instance, Straus calls it “irresponsible”, just like the controversial 2014 BBC documentary “Rwanda’s Untold Story”. He argues that the qualification as genocide of the RPF’s crimes stands in the way of acknowledging “both the genocide committed against the minority Tutsi population and the mass violence committed against the Hutu population”, which he qualifies as “crimes against humanity”.¹¹⁴ At stake is the possibility to recognise both the genocide and other forms of mass violence, and the right for all victims to commemorate and mourn. This issue has recently again been the subject of research in Northern Rwanda, where the majority of citizens experienced RPF atrocities but cannot freely talk about their suffering because of political constraints. The data recall recurrent patterns of abuse by the RPF¹¹⁵, but their “unspeakability” leads to structural violence, reflected in “feelings of inequality, grievance and complaints against the government among people in Musanze”.¹¹⁶ Rever caused new controversy when she published research claiming that RPF commandos had infiltrated the Hutu militia and participated in the killing of Tutsi. Her focus was on the extermination of Tutsi at the iconic Bisesero massacre, where the role of the

¹¹³ “Eine E-mail zu viel”, *Die Welt*, 3 April 2019; “Sezibera: German envoy recalled by own gov’t over ‘unacceptable behaviour’”, *The New Times*, 5 April 2019; “German envoy leaves Rwanda over ‘abusive’ comments”, *The East African*, 5 April 2019.

¹¹⁴ STRAUS, S., “The Limits of a Genocide Lens: Violence Against Rwandans in the 1990s”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 21, n° 4, 2019, pp. 504-524. However, regarding the massacre of Hutu refugees in Zaire/DRC, Straus thinks “a case for genocide is present” (p. 514).

¹¹⁵ For instance the calling of villagers to meetings where they were killed by soldiers (often referred to as “*kwitaba inama*” equals “*kwitaba imana*”, meaning “being called to a meeting” equals “being called to God”, a cruel play of words).

¹¹⁶ OTAKE, Y., “Suffering of silenced people in northern Rwanda”, *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 222, 2019, p. 177.

French army during *Opération Turquoise* is still the subject of heated debate in France.¹¹⁷

Another way in which the RPF's past record resurfaced was through recent reminders of the 2010 Mapping Report made on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which listed gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed, among others, by the Rwandan Patriotic Army in the DRC between 1993 and 2003. When awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, in his acceptance speech on 10 December 2018 Dr. Denis Mukwege called on the international community to follow the recommendations made in the report which is "gathering mold in an office drawer in New York". He insisted that as long as the perpetrators remain unpunished and there are no truth-finding and reconciliation efforts in Congo, lasting peace cannot be achieved.¹¹⁸ While this had been a taboo subject for his predecessor, new Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi seemed to timidly open the door for the creation "one day, of a criminal tribunal for the crimes committed in the Congo".¹¹⁹ This was followed less than a month later by a conference organised on 2 December in the French National Assembly under the title "DRC Mapping Report: An instrument for the end to impunity?".¹²⁰

6. REGIONAL CONFLICTS

The relations of post-1994 Rwanda with each of its four neighbours have been hostile at one point or another. Those with Tanzania seem to have been mended since Magufuli became president in 2015. Rwanda twice invaded the DRC, supported Congolese proxy rebels after its army officially left the country, and continued to benefit from the illegal exploitation of Congolese resources. While relations were ambiguous under Kabila's presidency, they are improving under his successor Etienne Tshisekedi. In March 2019, for the first time a Congolese president went to Kigali and paid tribute to the genocide victims at a memorial site. Some Congolese reacted furiously, and recalled the human and material damage done to the DRC by Rwanda.¹²¹ Later on, together with Angolan president João Lourenço, Tshisekedi and Kagame

¹¹⁷ REVER, J., "The Genocide of Tutsis in Bisesero", *Medium*, 21 December 2019. Infiltration of militia was also alleged to have taken place in "Rwanda: Kajuguhakwa Valens, commandant en chef des brigades clandestines", *Musabyimana.net*, 22 December 2019.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.mukwegefoundation.org/2018/12/press-release-nobel-peace-prize-2018-denis-mukwege/>

¹¹⁹ "RDC: Tshisekedi à Paris en VRP du 'Congo nouveau'", *Afrikarabia*, 11 November 2019.

¹²⁰ "Crimes de guerre en RDC: Comment donner une suite au rapport Mapping?", *RFI*, 3 December 2019. The commemoration of the 30 December 1998 massacre in Makobola was a new occasion for Dr. Mukwege to demand justice ("Massacres de Makobola: 'Tant que justice ne sera pas rendue, ces crimes resteront une plaie béante sur la conscience de l'humanité'", *Actualité.cd*, 31 December 2019).

¹²¹ "Rwanda: le président Tshisekedi au mémorial du génocide à Kigali, une première", *AFP*, 25 March 2019.

agreed to co-operate to restore regional security by combating Congolese and foreign armed groups.¹²² However, when this plan become more concrete, it provoked hostile reactions in the DRC. At the end of October, after senior military officers from Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda met in Goma to discuss the security situation, and the DRC's chief of staff suggested joint military operations, the initiative caused angry reactions. A pro-government MP challenged the defence ministry: "A mistake that absolutely must be avoided is to authorise Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian troops to enter the DRC".¹²³ Others expressed concern in light of some neighbours' past interventions in the country and hostile relations between them (see below).¹²⁴ The head of the UN peacekeeping mission Monusco stated that the organisation could not support foreign forces intervening in the DRC.¹²⁵ Resistance against Tshisekedi's seeking closer ties with Rwanda gained further impetus in late November when he withdrew the arrest warrants against the leaders of the defeated Rwanda-backed rebel movement M23.¹²⁶

Relations with Burundi have been bad since at least 2015, and they deteriorated further in 2019. In March, Rwandan general Muganga warned the population in the Bugesera region not to go to Burundi: "He who will be caught will not have the chance to tell others his fate. We will not even introduce him to the police, rather we will immobilise him". Under these circumstances, Burundians started feeling insecure about visiting their relatives in Rwanda.¹²⁷ In May, Rwandan Special Forces were accused of fighting alongside Burundian Red Tabara rebels in the Congolese South Kivu region bordering Burundi.¹²⁸ A very serious incident occurred during the night of 16-17 November, when a Burundian army position was attacked in Mabayi, Cibitoke province, less than 10 km from the Rwandan border. This surprise attack left at least eight Burundian soldiers dead and more wounded. The assailants were said to have used equipment, such as bullet-proof vests and night vision binoculars,

¹²² "Kagame, Tshisekedi, Lourenço agree to uproot armed groups", *The New Times*, 31 May 2019.

¹²³ "African military chiefs discuss Great Lakes security issues", *The East African*, 24 October 2019.

¹²⁴ "Interrogations et inquiétudes autour de la possible intervention conjointe des FARDC, du Burundi, de l'Ouganda et du Rwanda pour 'pacifier' l'est de la RDC", *Le Congo libéré*, 15 October 2019; "Rapprochement militaire RDC, Rwanda, Burundi et Ouganda, une alliance qui effraie", *Le Potentiel* (Kinshasa), 17 October 2019.

¹²⁵ "UN says will not back any foreign intervention in DR Congo", *The East African*, 25 October 2019.

¹²⁶ "Angry Reactions As DRC President Rescinds Arrest Warrants Against M23 Rebel Leaders", *The Chronicles*, 23 November 2019.

¹²⁷ "Rwanda speaks its mind", *Iwacu English News*, 1 April 2019. Also see "Le Rwanda demande à ses citoyens de ne plus se rendre au Burundi", *KivuPress*, 22 March 2019.

¹²⁸ "Rwanda's Special Forces Fighting alongside Mai Mai Rebels against Banyamulenge", *CommandIPost*, 23 May 2019.

unavailable to rebel groups. The Burundian government accused Rwanda of aggression, constituting “a threat to peace and security in the entire great lakes region”. If repeated, the government would use its “right of legitimate defence”. It “deplored the inertia of regional and international instances seized by Burundi” on previous occasions, and reiterated its appeal to the UN, the AU, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the EAC to fully play their roles, while claiming Rwanda refused access to the ICGLR’s Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism (EJVM).¹²⁹ There was no formal Rwandan response, but the regime’s mouthpiece published a condescending op-ed, by the way insulting President Nkurunziza (“Well, Pierre, you chose a thorny bed and must therefore lie in it”).¹³⁰

Outside of the immediate region, relations with South Africa have remained frosty, mainly as a result of the operations of Rwandan death squads (see earlier on the Karegeya case). Although in late 2018, Kagame and Ramaphosa made clear they wanted to normalise relations, justice stood in the way of politics. While Kagame accuses South Africa of harbouring terrorists trying to topple him, the South African justice system accuses Rwanda of attempting to eliminate political opponents in South Africa. In April, the police investigation into the murder of Karegeya concluded that the suspects were “directly linked to the involvement of the Rwandan government”.¹³¹ But the issues between the two go beyond judicial squabbles. When Kagame, in his capacity as AU chair, wanted to lead a delegation to mediate in the January electoral standoff in the DRC, Ramaphosa and some other African leaders opposed the move which they considered an interference in the DRC’s sovereignty, in addition to irritation at Kagame’s posture as a “defender of democracy”.¹³² Two months later, things further soured when Kagame stated that South Africa prefers his exiled opponents over better relationships with Rwanda. “The door is open when South Africa finds it more appealing to deal with us than with those groups”.¹³³

¹²⁹ République du Burundi, Présidence de la République, “Communiqué du gouvernement de la République du Burundi suite à l’agression du Rwanda contre le Burundi”, Bujumbura, 28 November 2019. Also see “Burundi Accuses Rwanda of Armed Attacks And Denying Access for Regional Monitoring Body”, *The Chronicles*, 28 November 2019.

¹³⁰ “Inner contradictions bedevil Burundi, not scapegoat Rwanda”, *The New Times*, 29 November 2019.

¹³¹ “Suspects in murder of ex-Rwandan spy chief ‘directly linked to Kigali’ – Inquest”, *The Guardian*, 18 April 2019; “Suspects in murder of Rwandan dissident Patrick Karegeya are ‘directly linked’ to Paul Kagame’s government, police say”, *The Globe and Mail*, 18 April 2019.

¹³² FABRICIUS, P., *Are Rwanda and South Africa irreconcilable?*, Pretoria, ISS, 25 January 2019.

¹³³ “South Africa and Rwanda in dirty fallout”, *The Star* (Gauteng), 18 March 2019. Also see “Frosty relationship between SA and Rwanda not thawing soon”, *The Star*, 18 March 2019; “SA has dim view of Rwandan hit squads”, *The Star*, 25 March 2019.

By far the worst relations have been those with Uganda. As seen in earlier chronicles, the deterioration has been steady in previous years, and a further slide occurred in 2019. As there have been many developments, this survey can only offer a broad summary. A war of words erupted between Kagame and Museveni in March. Clearly aiming at Uganda, Kagame stated that “You can attempt to destabilise our country (...). But there is one thing that is impossible. No one can bring me to my knees”. Museveni responded the same day: “Those who want to destabilise our country do not know our capacity. It is very big. Once we mobilise, you can’t survive”. Rwanda effectively shut the border and warned its citizens not to travel to Uganda for safety reasons. Several Rwandans and Ugandans allegedly acting for Rwandan intelligence were arrested or expelled.¹³⁴ Influential opinion makers began to consider war a possibility. Andrew Mwenda, a prominent Ugandan journalist but also a member of Kagame’s Presidential Advisory Council (PAC)¹³⁵, said he thought “Uganda and Rwanda will most likely degenerate into war”.¹³⁶ Two months later, on the Rwandan side, Albert Rudatsimburwa wrote that “War seems inevitable, more than ever before”.¹³⁷ Despite some minor border incidents and limited troop deployments on both sides, direct war was, however, avoided. Media close to both countries’ governments and intelligence services traded accusations and insults. Rwanda’s *The New Times* in particular published almost daily hostile articles for months on end. In substance, Uganda accused Rwanda of infiltrating its security and intelligence services, and of plotting Museveni’s overthrow, while Rwanda claimed Uganda supported terrorist organisations, in particular the RNC and the FDLR, and had illegally arrested, detained and tortured hundreds of Rwandan citizens.

There seemed to be better news at last on 21 August, when Kagame and Museveni signed an agreement in Luanda (Angola), brokered by the Angolan and Congolese presidents, who earlier agreed with Kagame to co-operate on regional security (see above). The Luanda Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), aimed at restoring relations between the two countries, called on them to “refrain from actions conducive to destabilisation or subversion in the territory of the other party”, as well as from “acts such as the financing, training and infiltration of destabilising forces”. It also called for the respect of rights and freedoms of each other’s nationals and the resumption of cross-border

¹³⁴ ASHABA, I. and BAREEBE, G., “Closed borders and fighting words: Rwanda and Uganda’s deepening rift”, *African Arguments*, 12 March 2019.

¹³⁵ Mwenda was dropped from the PAC in September, and he should have seen things coming after he was accused of pro-Uganda bias (“Uganda-Rwanda crisis: Andrew Mwenda can no longer feign neutrality”, *The New Times*, 7 June 2019).

¹³⁶ “Op-Ed: Inside the Rwanda-Uganda conflict”, *Watchdog Uganda*, 11 March 2019.

¹³⁷ “By parading Rwanda’s dead for political points, Uganda crosses the line”, *The New Times*, 28 May 2019.

activities.¹³⁸ The ink on the agreement was barely dry when the Ugandan government blocked a number of Rwandan online media outlets, and Rwanda retaliated by doing the same the next day.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, at the first meeting of the Ad hoc Commission for the implementation of the Luanda MoU, which met in Kigali on 16 September, it was agreed that both countries would end attacks in both mainstream and social media.¹⁴⁰ Other than that, no progress was made, but the parties agreed to convene again a month later in Kampala.

In the meantime, hostilities continued in the media, for instance when the Ugandan *Saturday Vision* claimed that Kagame had secretly met opposition leader Kiiza Besigye and the *New Times* again accused Uganda of attempting to destabilise Rwanda.¹⁴¹ The border remained closed and shooting incidents caused the death of Rwandans and Ugandans suspected of smuggling. An identical picture taken near the border was said to refer to Rwandans arrested in Uganda by one side¹⁴² and to Rwandans fleeing their country by the other.¹⁴³ After a second meeting of the Ad hoc Commission was postponed on two occasions, it finally took place on 13 December, but the differences were such that the two sides even failed to agree on a joint communiqué. State Minister Nduhungerehe, who headed the Rwandan delegation, declared that “it is clear that there is no good faith and no political will on the part of Uganda to resolve this crisis”.¹⁴⁴

At the time of writing, the two countries were no closer to finding and implementing an agreement. The fallout between Rwanda on the one hand, and Burundi and Uganda on the other has had a stifling impact on regional cooperation. All three countries are members of the EAC, which has come to a virtual standstill. In an irony of history, Museveni handed over the chair of the organisation to Kagame at the 20th summit on 1 February 2019, but while Kagame was very active when he chaired the AU in 2018, he was paralysed as EAC chair, and doesn't seem to have taken a single initiative. The 21st

¹³⁸ “Uganda, Rwanda leaders sign pact aimed at ending tensions”, *The East African*, 21 August 2019.

¹³⁹ “Spoilers in Kagame-Museveni Peace-Pact Show The Future Of ‘War’ Is Online”, *The Chronicles*, 28 August 2019. The war of words immediately resumed, see e.g. “Ugandan Leader and His Minions Dishonor The Terms Of The Luanda MoU, Then Blame Kigali!”, *Kigali Today*, 26 August 2019.

¹⁴⁰ “Rwanda, Uganda Agree To Stop Media ‘Propaganda’ Against Each Other”, *The Chronicles*, 16 September 2019.

¹⁴¹ “Rwanda Not Happy With Continuing ‘Fake News’ From Uganda”, *The Chronicles*, 28 September 2019; “Editorial: Trial of 25 brings worms out of the woodwork”, *The New Times*, 3 October 2019.

¹⁴² “Uganda arrests close to 200 Rwandans”, *The New Times*, 27 November 2019.

¹⁴³ “Number Of Rwandan Nationals Fleeing To Uganda Grows Amid Heightened Tension”, *NileWires*, 26 November 2019.

¹⁴⁴ “Nduhungerehe speaks out on impasse in Rwanda, Uganda talks”, *The New Times*, 18 December 2019.

summit, scheduled for 30 November, was postponed with no reason given, except that it happened at the request of one of the summit members, i.e. one of the presidents. Under these circumstances it is surprising that neither of the two presidents who are not involved in the regional conflicts, Kenya's Uhuru Kenyatta and Tanzania's John Magufuli¹⁴⁵, have actively intervened together to engineer solutions, particularly as they possess a powerful asset, namely access to the sea of landlocked Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.¹⁴⁶

7. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Like many other African countries, Rwanda is seeking to diversify its international relations and to move away from traditional western donors. Although China has been present in Rwanda for decades, lately there has been a steep rise in co-operation that has seen growing investments in public infrastructure (government buildings, stadiums and roads) and in Kigali's "Prime Economic Zone". The Chinese army even trained Rwandan soldiers for the military parade at the 25th Liberation Day. They goose-stepped the Chinese way and shouted slogans in Chinese.¹⁴⁷ Despite the advantages of no-strings-attached Chinese funding, observers have warned against the perils of dependency, in Rwanda and elsewhere. In June, a World Bank report cautioned Rwanda over its growing debt-to-GDP ratio, said to have risen to 53 per cent. "Now it seems to be sleepwalking toward a territory that some of its fellow African states (...) have perilously entered, (...) the 'Chinese debt trap'".¹⁴⁸ Russia is another newcomer. The nuclear deal with Rosatom was mentioned earlier. Russia has also become an increasingly important weapons supplier.

The intensification of relations with Qatar has already been mentioned. After a Saudi-led coalition entered into conflict with Qatar, Doha has attempted to break out of its isolation. It initially tried to tie some West Africa states¹⁴⁹, but seems now to want to expand its influence elsewhere in Africa, and sees Rwanda as a gateway.¹⁵⁰ In just over a year, Kagame visited Doha twice and Emir Tamim ben Hamad Al-Thani twice came to Kigali. At his April visit

¹⁴⁵ The third "non-concerned" president, South Sudan's Salva Kiir, is not mentioned here, because he has trouble enough at home.

¹⁴⁶ REYNTJENS, F., "East Africa should intervene to defuse Rwanda-Uganda war of words", *The Conversation*, 25 March 2019.

¹⁴⁷ "Chinese army instructors train African troops as China-Rwanda military ties deepen", *Global Times*, 5 August 2019.

¹⁴⁸ PADUANO, S., "China's Investments in Rwanda Raise Familiar Questions About Debt", *The Atlantic*, 3 August 2019.

¹⁴⁹ "A Year after the Start of the Saudi-Emirati Blockade against Qatar. What Are the Consequences for West Africa?", IFRI, *L'Afrique en questions*, No. 42, 8 October 2018.

¹⁵⁰ AUGE, Benjamin, "Avec Paul Kagame, le Qatar semble avoir trouvé son interlocuteur privilégié en Afrique", *Le Monde*, 13 December 2019.

to Kigali, the Emir was greeted on the airport's tarmac, as part of the line of welcoming officials, by Mauritanian Mustapha Ould Limam Chafi, an unofficial advisor of the Emir who is suspected of having close links with radical jihadist organisations like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁵¹ His presence of course raised eyebrows, particularly as the visit coincided with the Islamic State recognising a new "Central Africa Province" after claiming its first attack in the DRC.¹⁵²

Rwanda remains a bone of contention and the centre of intensely polarised debate in France, in particular over French support for the genocidal pre-1994 regime and the aims of the French army's *Opération Turquoise* in the Summer of 1994. This polarisation became again painfully clear after the death in July 2019 of Pierre Péan, an investigative journalist and writer very critical of the RPF and its supporters in France.¹⁵³ Some, including Rwandan Minister Nduhungirehe, openly welcomed his passing, while others profusely praised him.¹⁵⁴ Another sign of the delicate nature of the debate was the decision of Fayard not to publish the French translation of Judi Rever's book *In Praise of Blood. The Crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front*, although a contract had been signed and a translator assigned. No official reason was given, but an internal source mentioned "a polemical and complex context (...) threatening other long-running projects", thus suggesting considerable pressure. Even the putting into place on 5 April of a nine-member commission tasked by Macron to study the French archives on Rwanda from 1990 to 1994 caused controversy. Indeed, the commission doesn't include Rwanda experts, and some scholars were claimed to have been excluded because of their critical stance on the role of France.¹⁵⁵

8. CONCLUSION

In a sense, 2019 has been a "normal" year. Except perhaps in the area of media freedoms, political governance has remained deeply flawed. The political space is tightly controlled, the opposition continues to be threatened and intimidated, civil society remains silenced, and people are tightly policed. The

¹⁵¹ Mauritania has an international arrest warrant running against Ould Limam Chafi since 2011.

¹⁵² "Islamic State recognizes new Central Africa Province, deepening ties with DR Congo militants", *The Defense Post*, 30 April 2019.

¹⁵³ See in particular PEAN, P., *Noires fureurs, blancs menteurs. Rwanda 1990-1994*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2005.

¹⁵⁴ Even President Macron paid a sustained tribute, although at the same time he was attempting to mend relations with Kigali (www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/07/26/deces-de-pierre-pean).

¹⁵⁵ The commission's president Vincent Duclert addressed the polemic in a long interview: "Génocide des Tutsi au Rwanda – Vincent Duclert: 'L'Elysée ne m'a pas imposé les noms des membres de la commission'", *Jeune Afrique*, 12 April 2019.

invisible but pervasive structural violence is a medium to long term threat to future stability. This domestic image is further complicated by tense regional relations.

Interestingly, just like at the beginning of the acute violence in 1994, those targeted for persecution and even physical elimination are (supposed) opponents irrespective of their ethnicity. Today, both Tutsi¹⁵⁶ and Hutu¹⁵⁷ are at risk, and both can be found in support of the regime and in the opposition. This divide also expresses itself in extremely polarised and often brutal exchanges on social media. As in 1994 and the preceding years, it is therefore political rather than ethnic.

Rwanda divides now more than ever. It divides people, both inside the country¹⁵⁸ and in the region. It divides opinion in Rwanda and abroad. Opinions and positions become ever more polarised, rendering the discovery of a common “truth” increasingly difficult to achieve. Even the possibility of a dialogue aimed at discovering that “truth” has further receded. Because in Rwanda like elsewhere the past heavily weighs on the present, this is a bad omen for those hoping that Rwanda and the great lakes region will soon find lasting peace.

Antwerp, January 2020

¹⁵⁶ E.g. Mushayidi, Mutabazi, Byabagamba, Rusagara, Kayumba Nyamwasa, Rwigara and Umuhoza.

¹⁵⁷ In particular leading members of the FDU-Inkingi.

¹⁵⁸ For instance, recent research shows that the blurring of “Tutsi” with “survivor” and the deliberate passing down of survivor identity to Tutsi youth have created conditions for a “survivor nationalism”, which exacerbates social tensions and risks sustainable peace in the long term (BALDWIN, G., “Constructing identity through commemoration: *Kwibuka* and the rise of survivor nationalism in post-conflict Rwanda”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 57, n° 3, 2019, pp. 355-375).