



29 January 2014 - Rwanda has come a long way since the unspeakable [horrors](#) that took place 20 years ago, during which up to one million people perished and as many as 250,000 women were raped, leaving the country's population traumatized and its infrastructure decimated.

Since then, Rwanda embarked on an ambitious justice and reconciliation process with the ultimate aim of all Rwandans once again living side by side in peace. Parliamentary elections were held in September 2013, during which Rwanda's governing RPF party won a resounding victory, securing 76% of the vote.

United Nations Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai has commended the Rwandan Government on its economic development in since the 1994 genocide, but also urged that undue restrictions on the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association be lifted so that the country can expand its achievements to the fields of multiparty democracy and human rights.

"I commend Rwanda for its remarkable progress in developing infrastructure, building institutions and ensuring stability and security over the past 20 years," Mr Kiai said at the end of his first official visit to the country.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government has been praised for maintaining stability and overseeing rapid economic growth, but President Kagame has been increasingly accused of ignoring human rights and stamping out any opposition.

“The ease with which businesses can be registered and operate in Rwanda is notable. It is one reason for the country’s economic transformation,” Mr Kiai said. “A similar approach to the civil society sector would yield significant economic, social and political dividends, allowing for innovation and creativity.”

Civil society groups can take months to register, while businesses can be formed in six hours or less.

The Rwandan Constitution guarantees freedom of peaceful assembly, but the Special Rapporteur said he found that in practice, peaceful protests criticising government policies were generally not allowed. Rwanda’s constitution also guarantees the right to freedom of association, but according to Mr Kiai, there are onerous obstacles to registration, limits on civil society’s freedom to operate in certain fields, and government interference in the internal affairs of groups deemed too critical of official policy.

Dissenting views in the political realm are rare due to the Government favouring a type of “consensus politics” that strongly discourages public criticism. Registration of political parties remains “long, laborious and, in far too many instances, arbitrary”, according to Mr Kiai.

Since 2011, President Kagame has repeatedly been accused of backing the M23 movement in DR Congo in order to counter the FDLR, a Hutu rebel group accused of involvement in the genocide of 1994.

After nearly two years since it was created in eastern DR Congo, the M23 rebellion was last year [defeated](#) by the Congolese army backed by an intervention brigade of the UN’s stabilisation mission in DR Congo ([Monusco](#)).

However there have been allegations that Kigali allows M23 to recruit from inside its borders in violation of a deal signed with Kinshasa.

A Rwandan diplomat has [dismissed allegations](#) that Rwanda is helping defeated Congolese rebel group M23 to regroup. According to Olivier Nduhungirehe, Rwanda’s deputy permanent representative to the UN, the allegations were “recycled and unacceptable rumours without evidence.”

UNRIC’s related links:

Statement of United Nations Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14201&LangID=E>

UN Human Rights, Country Page – Rwanda: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/RWIndex.aspx>