

“Scars of Genocide”: Rwandan Government Attempts to Silence Opposition

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The head of Rwandan opposition party United Democratic Forces (UDF), Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, was interrogated by the Rwandan regime for several hours at the Criminal Investigation Department in Kigali on Wednesday.

“Mrs. Victoire Ingabire responded to the police invitation because there was a threat that if she would not show up, the police would pick her up. She can’t even flee the country without a police clearance,” a spokesperson of UDF said.

A few days earlier she barely escaped a lynch mob when she and her assistant went to register their political party. Her assistant, Joseph Ntawangundi, was beaten up in front of the government building in broad daylight and arrested two days later on charges of genocide. The latest event seems another attempt [by the regime] to intimidate and silence opposition in the run-up to elections in August.

Scars of Genocide

Mrs. Ingabire’s interrogation does not come as a surprise after Rwandan President Paul Kagame accused her in a press conference on Monday of “divisionism” and warned that “eventually the law will catch up with her.”

In 2003, the current regime installed a law that forbids any political activity or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion. Yet, critics say the law is liable to different interpretations and can be used as a tool to silence opposition.

The UDF, and Mrs. Ingabire in particular, have been criticized by the current regime for highlighting the crimes against Hutus during the 1994 genocide during which 800,000 people or 20 percent of the population, mostly Tutsis but also some Hutus, were slaughtered over the course of 100 days.

“In Rwanda, people can only talk about the Tutsi genocide and it is a taboo to talk about Hutu victims, and especially to discuss war crimes committed by the ruling party and its armed wing during and after the war and genocide.” said a UDC spokesperson.

Charges such as revisionism, denial of genocide, and collaboration with the rebellion group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) can easily result in life sentence or sentences of 20 years and more in prison, the UDC spokesperson said.

Depending on International Pressure

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Ingabire’s assistant, Joseph Ntawangundi, has been transferred to the Kimironko prison on charges of genocide. The UDC has called these allegations “sheer lies” and says that Mr. Ntawangundi was not even in the country during the genocide in 1994.

Likewise, other members of UDC are in danger of being arrested. Mrs. Ingabire is still waiting for a follow-up to her case from the police and her political party is still not officially registered.

“I would also like to emphasize that being in an opposition political party does not qualify someone to be an enemy of the state, and disagreeing with the current regime in power, does not make one to be an enemy of government,” Frank Habineza, president of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda says on their Web site.

More negative international publicity will cause the “pressure on the regime to be stronger, as the credibility of the election process will be at stake. Demonstrations of Rwandans inside and outside the country will be unavoidable,” said the UDC spokesperson.

These events might tarnish the country’s hoped for image as Africa’s “biggest success story.

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