

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) Condemns Human Rights Abuses in the Run Up to Elections in Rwanda

By [Global Research](#)

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[Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative](#) 22

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CHRI condemns the recent wave of killings and suppression of press freedoms in the run up to the Presidential election on the 9 August 2010. In the last two months Jean-Léonard Rugambage, a journalist working for the banned newspaper Umuvugizi, and Andre Kagwa Rwisereka, the vice president of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda, have been brutally murdered. There are allegations of RPF and security service involvement in a number of different incidents. Mr Frank Habineza, Green Party candidate for President, has complained that he has been subject to harassment and surveillance.

Lieutenant -General Nyamwasa, the former army chief of staff who is currently living in exile in Johannesburg, was the subject of an assassination attempt on 19 June 2010. The involvement of Rwandan security agents is strongly suspected and two of the individuals originally arrested by the South African police have now been released. Dominique Makeli, a former Rwandan journalist currently living in exile in Kampala, was the subject of an attempted abduction on the 28 June 2010 allegedly by Rwandan agents.

Two newspapers Umuseso and Umuvugizi have been banned by the High Media Council after allegations that they had published stories that insulted President Kagame incited the army, caused police insubordination and frightened the public, contrary to Article 83 of Rwanda's media law. Bernard Ntaganda, the PS Imberakuri candidate for president and currently the only independent registered candidate for President, has been charged with terrorism offences after participating in a peaceful demonstration against the National Electoral Commission. Victorie Ingabire, the leader of the UDF, has been unable to register for the election and members of her party have been imprisoned and subject to abuse.

Rwanda joined the Commonwealth in November 2009 at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Port Spain. A few months prior to this CHRI released a report on Rwanda's human rights record, authored by the leading constitutional expert Professor Yash Ghai. The report cast doubt on Rwanda's human rights record and its democratic stability and highlighted the increasingly hegemonic nature of the RPF in Rwandan politics and concluded that due its poor human rights record Rwanda should not be admitted to the Commonwealth at the 2009 CHOGM.

The rapid increase in violence and the constriction of political space and human rights in Rwanda following their Commonwealth membership has unfortunately proven the report's predictions correct. Many supporters of Rwanda's application for membership argued that

Commonwealth membership would provide an incentive for the government to improve its human rights record. The actions of President Paul Kagame over the last six months have in fact shown the government to be committed to ensuring their own political survival and suppressing all political opposition to the RPF. The Commonwealth's silence on recent developments in Rwanda cast grave doubts on the organisation's commitments to the values that it recently re-affirmed at the 2009 CHOGM in Trinidad and Tobago. CHRI echoes the condemnation voiced by the UN Secretary General and the European Union over political killings in Rwanda and urges immediate independent international enquiry into these incidents and supports the Commonwealth Green Parliamentarians' call for Commonwealth representatives to be sent to Rwanda to immediately.

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