

PRESS STATEMENT

Response to recent public comments made about Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza by the President of the Republic of Rwanda

1. Today 25 July 2024, We, lawyers acting for Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, note with alarm comments made by the President of the Republic of Rwanda about our client during campaigning ahead of the elections that were held on 15 July 2024.
2. The President's comments are defamatory, recklessly inflammatory, and dangerous.
3. On 6 July 2024, the President spoke at a rally in Bugesera District. He spoke about the development of Rwanda and asserted that "No one will come and destroy what we have built." He then stated that, "There are a few among us who have agreed to be used by these people [*ie.* political opponents]. They present them as extraordinary people. These people are not going to achieve anything until they die."¹
4. On 9 July 2024, the President participated in a question-and-answer session with social media content creators in Mulindi village, Gicumbi District. During that session, he described Madame Ingabire as a "small woman of a genocidaire".² The President mocked Madame Ingabire for believing that she is a political opponent who wants to be the President of Rwanda.
5. On 13 July 2024, the President conducted a press conference. At the conclusion of that press conference, he referenced activities that he alleged Madame Ingabire was involved in, including "spending [her] time shouting", "fight[ing] with the evil insider her", "work[ing] with people involved in the war in Eastern Congo", and "wish[ing] or talk[ing] evil about Rwanda" before stating, "You know she will not end up well".³ The President added, "They [people such as Madame Ingabire and Charles Onana] cannot be allowed to reach a level where their action can have negative consequences on the country or on Rwandans. When it comes to that level, we find an appropriate solution...When they tell lies, refute what they say. But if they cross the line the consequences are clear."
6. These comments were made in the context of, and are wholly consistent with, the Rwandan government's long history of stifling any meaningful political opposition. Human Rights Watch has recently reported that "Commentators, journalists, opposition activists, and others speaking out on current affairs and criticizing public policies in Rwanda continued to face abusive prosecutions, enforced disappearances, and have at times died under unexplained circumstances. [...] As Rwanda approaches its 2024

¹ [Perezida Kagame yasobanuye impamvu yagiye gutura mu Bugesera](#), 6 July 2024

² [President Kagame Interactive Session with Content Creators in Gicumbi District | Mulindi, 9 July 24](#) from 1:04:25

³ [Press Conference with RPF Chairman and Presidential Candidate, H.E. Paul Kagame | 13 July 2024](#) from 1:19:23

general elections, space for political opposition remains closed. [...] There are over a dozen political opposition members in prison”.⁴

7. Freedom House has recently assessed Rwanda as being “Not Free” and attributed a score of 8/40 to Rwanda for the ability of its citizens to exercise political rights, reporting that the current regime “has also suppressed political dissent through pervasive surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary detention, torture, and renditions or suspected assassinations of exiled dissidents.”⁵
8. The International Federation for Human Rights recently found that, “The government shows little hesitation in exterminating, literally and symbolically, dissident voices that endeavour to emerge and organise to express discontent, fears and demands. Harassment, arbitrary arrests, illegal surveillance, attempted abductions and enforced disappearances are among the techniques favoured by the RPF to silence any opposition. What remains of civil society and political opposition is strangled by repression. [...] Democratic space has become inexistent in Rwanda and only hollow political groups remain”.⁶
9. There are numerous well-documented and credible reports of colleagues and members of Madame Ingabire’s political party having been unlawfully targeted, arbitrarily arrested, tortured, disappeared or murdered over the years, including Illuminée Iragena in March 2016,⁷ Jean Damascene Habarugira in May 2017,⁸ Boniface Twagirimana in October 2018,⁹ Anselme Mutuyimana in March 2019,¹⁰ Eugène Ndereyimana in July 2019,¹¹ Sylodio Dusabumuremyi in September 2019,¹² Théophile Ntirutwa in May 2020, and Venant Abayisenga in June 2020.¹³
10. None of these instances of unlawful targeting, arbitrary arrest, torture, disappearance or murder have been investigated adequately or at all by the Rwandan authorities. No person has ever been held accountable for these serious crimes. The activities of the

⁴ Human Rights Watch, [Rwanda, Events of 2023](#), 2024

⁵ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 2024

⁶ International Federation for Human Rights, [RWANDA: Democratic space held hostage by the Rwandan Patriotic Front \(RPF\)](#), July 2022, No. 797a, pages 4 and 23

⁷ Amnesty International, [Rwanda: Come clean about fate of missing activist Illuminée Iragena](#), 26 March 2017

⁸ Amnesty International, [Rwanda: Decades of attacks repression and killings set the scene for next month’s election](#), 7 July 2017

⁹ Human Rights Watch, [One Month Since Rwandan Opposition Leader ‘Disappeared’](#); 8 November 2018; Amnesty International, Rwanda: [Opposition politician found dead](#), 18 March 2019

¹⁰ Amnesty International, Rwanda: [Opposition politician found dead](#), 18 March 2019; CNN, [Aide to leading Rwandan opposition politician found dead](#), 11 March 2019

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, [Rwanda: Disappearances Require Credible Investigations: Month Later, Journalist and Opposition Member Still Missing](#), 15 August 2019

¹² Amnesty International, [Rwanda: Ensure justice for opposition politician stabbed to death](#), 24 September 2019

¹³ Human Rights Watch, [Rwanda: Crackdown on Opposition, Media Intensifies Space for Dissent Closes](#), 19 October 2021

Rwandan State have fostered an environment of absolute impunity for human rights abuses committed against political opponents.

11. It was false, knowingly defamatory and recklessly inflammatory of the President to describe Madame Ingabire as a “small woman of a genocidaire”. It was undemocratic of the President to seek to stifle Madame Ingabire’s right to voice her legitimate political dissent.
12. Given the well-established context of total intolerance of those who dare to criticise the current regime in Rwanda, it was dangerous of the President to state that, if she does not stop, “we find an appropriate solution”, and that “the consequences are clear.” The President’s statement that, “You know she will not end up well” amounts to a threat to her life and security.
13. Such dangerous comments have the effect of emboldening prominent elements of the Rwandan community to make serious threats of violence against Madame Ingabire. For example, in a YouTube video posted on 16 July 2024 with nearly 34,000 views, a social media “influencer” named Apôtre Mutabazi stated that Madame Ingabire “should count herself lucky that I am not among those who take decisions on what to do with her. I would suggest that she deserves a bullet in the head.”¹⁴ Past practice demonstrates that any harm that may befall Madame Ingabire would be met with impunity.
14. The Rwandan government will be held accountable if Madame Ingabire comes to any harm.
15. We call on the President (i) to acknowledge that Madame Ingabire has the right to continue with her political activities, (ii) to publicly discourage and deplore any attempts to threaten Madame Ingabire’s life and physical integrity, and (iii) to guarantee her future security.

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¹⁴ [Imvugo za Ingabire Victoire kuri Perezida Kagame zirandya Mutabazi ariye karungu ninshake mfungwe](#), 16 July 2024, from 0:04:08