



Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda

REPORT ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OF ASSOCIATION AND SECURITY IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

Press Release

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As of many regions in Africa, the countries of the Great lakes region are subject to human rights violations and this undermines the security of this part of the continent. Due to many factors, violations are not internally denounced. The main cause is to not freely express opinions. The other one is the obstruction of ways to channel opinions. Some those ways as associations and medias are extremely controled by States. This led to impunity , insecurity and destabilization of internal and regional governance and state.

1. Freedom of expression and of association

The situation of freedom of expression is emblematic in Burundi, Rwanda an The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

With the crisis in Burundi since 2015, many national NGOs have closed and have declared their dissolution by the Gouvernement last year. Human rights defenders and journalistes have been frced to leave their country. Others have been killed or arrested and tortured. Opposition political parties are divided and many of their members have been arrested or exiled. The situation in the country is slowly becoming safe but thousands of people fled the country. They are in the border countries and are not yet ready to go back home as they consider the country is not safe yet.

In Rwanda, after the genocide, the crimes against humanity and crimes of war, the country seems to be safe but freedom of expression and of association are still regularly violated. Laws have been voted to guaranty those freedoms to support others rights but contain restrictions denounced by international NGOs and some diplomatic Missions in their annual reports. The local civil society and themedia fear to do so.

Huaman rights defenders and journalists are regularly arrested, tortured, intimidated, harrassed or killed (see journalist of BBC arrested, and cassien Ntamuhanga and kizito and orther killed). Opposition political parties d not exist practically.

In the DRC, presidential election last year were affected by rebellions in some areas and demonstrations by people in the whole country. They asked the president to non candidate over the constitutional term. The media as well as the catholic curch covered the situation. But some people, journalists, priests and human rights defenders have been arrested, intimidated, tortured or killed.



Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda

Opposition political parties have been intimidated and harrassed, but they were very proactive. Owever, we can say that they have been divided for unclear interest in electing one f them who has been coopted by the ruling party. The situation is currently denounced by opposition parties and members of the local civil sociaty qnd the media.

2. The security in the region

The safety in the great lakes region is regularly affected by implosive situation in each country which leads people ti flee their countries for their security.

Those situations are manly linked to governance and elections in each country.

In Burundi, since 2015, the situation has been implosive because of the iterpration of their constitution about the presidential term. An attempted coup has failed ans the regime has installed repressive measures. Thousans people have fled the country to border countries. The crisis in Burundi led to tension between Rwanda and Burundi, the Burundian President accusing the Rwandan President to support a rebellion against his country. On the other side, the Rwandan President has criticized the Burundian President to support a rebellion too against Rwanda. The movement of people and goods between both countries are blocked. Hundred of thousands of burundian refugees who have fled the country (from 2015-2017) live in many camps in Rwanda. The two countries are not safe for people who are seen as member of opposition or considered as such.

With the DRC, the eastern region of the country has periodically received refugees from Rwanda and Burundi. Successive waves of refugees have been registered in 1959-1963 (from Rwanda), 1973 (from Burundi), 1993 (from Burundi), 1990-1995 (from Rwanda) and 2015 (from Burundi). The country has been affected by the massive arrival of refugees from Rwanda (over a million of people) in 1994. Some of those refugees are still living there despite successive rebellions in the region. Many rebellions in that region have been supported by neighboring countries (Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda) until some of them fight against each other within DRC when sharing minerals resources. From DRC since 1998-2012, thousands of rwandophone people have fled the eastern region of DRC during rebellions supported by Rwanda and Uganda and live in many camps in Rwanda and in Uganda with the assistance of UNHCR. Rebellions still exist and destabilize all the region.

People in the region are not free in many ways to live the lifes as citizens in their country as the administration control does not cover all the country.

Since 2018, tensions between the President of Uganda and the President of Rwanda have undermined the movement of people of both countries. Rhey blame each other for supporting rebellion and opposition or interfering in the internal security of their respective countries.

This year, the movement of goods and people has been closed at the border. Rwanda and Uganda are now living a cold war which can be an open conflict at any time. This is perceived



Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda

through the harsh and insulting words used in speech and the media between the heads of States of both countries. Those words don't exist in diplomatic relationships.

At the end, if no mediation occurs to manage the current crisis, the region is going again to live a war which will result in many losses and impact on human beings and on human rights.

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