



## Rwanda: recent political and security developments

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Paul Kagame and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) remain in a dominant political position domestically. While this is in part due to the country's considerable economic and development progress over the past decade, some argue that it also reflects a political culture in which open dissent is often not tolerated. Parliamentary elections are due in September 2013. Kagame has given indications that he may step down at the next presidential election, which is due in 2017.

Rwanda's role in the African Great Lakes region remains controversial. Despite repeated denials on the part of its government, there is now virtually complete consensus across the international community that it has been providing military and political support to the largest rebel group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the M23. This led donors, including the UK, to freeze some aid in late 2012, although there has been some resumption in recent months. There is general agreement that peace there will be impossible to achieve without Rwandan engagement. In recent months, another fragile peace process has been under way.

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# 1 Politics and security

## 1.1 The domestic scene

Paul Kagame and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) remain in a dominant political position. While this is in part due to the country's considerable economic and development progress over the past decade, some argue that it also reflects a political culture in which open dissent is often still not tolerated.

The RPF won a massive victory in 2008 parliamentary elections. Women outnumber men in the legislature. The next parliamentary elections are due to be held in September 2013. In August 2010, Kagame secured an even more overwhelming victory in presidential elections, winning 93% of the vote. However, international human rights groups accused Kagame of cracking down on opposition politicians, journalists and former military officials in the run up to the elections. The president of the opposition Green Party, Andre Kagwa, was murdered in Kigali. Kagame's main opponent in the election, Victoire Ingabire, the leader of the Forces Démocratiques Unifiées — Inkingi party, was arrested and imprisoned on charges including genocide denial and collaborating with Hutu rebels in the DRC. In October 2012 she was finally convicted on some, but not all, charges and sentenced to eight years in prison. Others also in the dock received lighter sentences. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch argued that she had not had a fair trial. She launched an appeal against the sentence; which began in mid April. The prosecution is also doing so, on the grounds that it was too lenient. The outcome is expected in May.

Few would question the complexity of Rwanda's historical legacy in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. But some argue that donors give Kagame and the RPF too easy a ride on democracy and human rights. The Rwandan government has a virtual monopoly of the media in the country and opposition parties face regular harassment. Independent civil society groups are often viewed with suspicion. Amongst Kagame and the RPF's critics is Filip Reyntjens, who wrote most recently in a [2010 article](#) for *African Affairs* about:

[...] the incremental way in which the RPF has monopolized power and eliminated countervailing voices. This piecemeal approach has allowed the regime to avoid condemnation by the international community, which was faced by steps considered, each on its own, to be too small to warrant a robust response. The RPF explored the limits of tolerance, and it realized there were none; so it crossed one rubicon after another. (p32)

The RPF's supporters have [responded highly critically](#) to the claims of Reyntjens. The regime certainly runs a highly effective public relations operation. Whether you go as far as Reyntjens or not, there is one historical parallel that is certainly worth bearing in mind to ward off complacency: in the 1980s, a Hutu-dominated Rwanda was also hailed by donors as a development 'success story'.

The next presidential election is in 2017. Kagame has not yet said whether he will stand again. He has talked in terms of developing a 'transition formula' for 2017, which holds open the possibility that he may not.

A major feature of the domestic political scene in Rwanda over the last decade or so has been the Gacaca programme, which arose out of the inevitable limits of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and RPF misgivings about how the Tribunal was operating. Human Rights Watch has expressed its ambivalence about the programme, calling its legacy

“mixed”. The scholar Phil Clark recently published an [assessment](#) of the programme, which has now completed its work. He wrote in the introduction:

Since 2001, the gacaca community courts have been the centrepiece of Rwanda’s justice and reconciliation process. Nearly every adult Rwandan has participated in the trials, but lawyers are banned from any official involvement. Human rights organisations fiercely opposed the use of gacaca for trying genocide cases, on the grounds that it fell short of international legal standards of fairness. Much criticism reflects legal rigidity towards the unprecedented challenges confronting post-genocide Rwanda – and a limited understanding of the aims of the community courts. Gacaca was inevitably imperfect, but also highly ambitious and innovative. While the full impact of the process will not be apparent for many years, gacaca has delivered benefits to Rwandans in the spheres of justice, truth and democratic participation. Other societies confronting the aftermath of mass conflict could learn much from Rwanda’s approach to local justice.

## 1.2 Rwanda’s role in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Despite repeated denials on the part of the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, there is now virtually complete consensus across the international community that they – and/or elements within their ranks – have been providing military and political support to the largest rebel group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the M23. This does not mean that the M23 is simply a cipher for those governments (see below), as many in Kinshasa often assert. Both countries have long records of direct and indirect involvement in the region. Most accept this has been driven by a combination of the presence there of armed groups hostile to them – including Hutu militia defending some of those who were responsible for the Rwandan genocide – and (perhaps more important now) commercial interests.

A report by a UN panel of experts finally broke Western reluctance to accept publicly that Rwanda and Uganda had gone well beyond self-defence in their policies towards eastern DRC, although some have questioned the panel’s credibility. Leaked in October 2012, the [final version](#) of the report was published on 22 November. In late November 2012, two Congolese rebel fighters who chose to abandon the group [confirmed to the BBC](#) the extent of Rwanda’s meddling and financial backing, alleging that the Rwandan government sent between \$15,000 and \$20,000 every month, allowing M23 to buy food, uniforms, and medicines. In the immediate aftermath of the UN report, the M23 intensified its military activities and took Goma briefly before again withdrawing.

Following the publication of a report by the International Development Committee, the UK [suspended its next tranche of budget support](#), worth £21 million, to Rwanda at the end of November, calling the evidence of Rwandan involvement with M23 “credible and compelling”. On 1 March, the UK announced that it was had “reprogrammed” its support and would now release £16 million for projects in Rwanda. However, Justine Greening was careful not to call it a resumption of general budget support.<sup>1</sup> Other donors have also relaxed aid freezes imposed on Rwanda in late 2012; these did cause it budgetary difficulties when introduced.

The Rwandan leadership and its supporters [claim](#) that it was the push by Western governments, along with their counterpart in the DRC, at the beginning of 2012 to have International Criminal Court (ICC) indictee and anti-Kinshasa rebel leader Bosco Ntaganda arrested that triggered the creation of M23 – and renewed violence in eastern DRC.

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb 1 March 2013 c47-8WS

But the reality is that there can be no lasting peace in eastern DRC without Rwandan involvement. While the UK and other donors did take a tougher line this time around, Rwanda has been central since the beginning of the year to peace efforts and was one of the signatories of a regional framework peace agreement signed on 23 February, under which the main M23 faction agreed to join the political process and for its fighters to be integrated into the DRC's armed forces. Renewed efforts to tackle Hutu militia in the region were also pledged. In addition, in March a neutral 'intervention brigade' was authorised by the UN Security Council with a mandate to enforce peace, rather than simply try to keep it. This is a [significant new element](#) that could make a real difference on the ground, but this apart, the current recipe for peace is not particularly new. However, there are grounds for hope based on the fact that the international community is once again more engaged. The UN Secretary-General has appointed Mary Robinson as his special envoy to the African Great Lakes region. She visited Kigali on 2 May as part of a regional tour.

On the downside, ongoing talks to flesh out the framework peace agreement between M23 and the Kinshasa government seem to have [stalled](#) for the moment, leading some to fear that the M23 may try to [strengthen its position](#) through military action before the intervention brigade, which is in the early stages of assembling itself, finds its feet.

For critics like Human Rights Watch who believe that the time has come to take a firmer line with Rwanda, the [messages from donors](#) sometimes seem frustratingly inconsistent. But they have recently gained one prize: In March, Bosco Ntaganda surrendered to the US Embassy in Kigali and is now awaiting trial in The Hague. Ntaganda has lost the support of his former Rwandan patrons, who are now backing an alternative M23 leadership under Sultan Makanga. Other M23 leaders and fighters opposed to Makanga have [renounced violence](#) and are seeking asylum in Rwanda. These splits do not appear to have significantly weakened the M23's fighting capabilities under Makanga.

Rwanda is a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, with troops currently stationed in Darfur.

### **1.3 Recent parliamentary answers**

**HL Deb 24 April 2013 c426-7WA**

*Asked by Lord Ashcroft*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the Foreign Secretary achieved all of his objectives on his recent visit to Rwanda.[HL6665]

**The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi):** The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), visited Rwanda, as part of a wider trip to central Africa, from 25-27 March. He visited Kigali on 26 March where he had a successful meeting with President Kagame. They discussed the need for a lasting solution to the conflict in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the terrible damage being caused in the region by the use of sexual violence as a weapon in conflict, and covered a number of bilateral issues.

#### **HC Deb 16 April 2013 c355W**

**John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which post-genocide reconciliation projects her Department supported in Rwanda in 2012; and which such projects her Department plans to support in 2014-15. [151272]

**Lynne Featherstone:** In 2012, the UK supported the Public Policy Information Monitoring and Advocacy (PPIMA) project which encourages community dialogue and advocacy. The project aims to deliver improved services and to strengthen social cohesion and reconciliation.

In the coming period, in addition to supporting a second phase of PPIMA, we will support the Aegis Trust to deliver a Genocide research and reconciliation programme, and a Kigali based think tank, the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace, to deliver a project focusing on building peace through research, dialogue and strategic advocacy. Through an Innovation for Education fund, we will also fund 'I-Witness in Rwanda', an innovative peace-building project that uses technology to encourage empathy for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

#### **HC Deb 1 March 2013 c47-8WS**

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** On 30 November, I released a written ministerial statement outlining my decision not to release general budget support to Rwanda at that time. That decision was made on the basis of a breach of the partnership principles which underpin the disbursement of general budget support.

At that time I signalled my commitment to continue with the successful development partnership with Rwanda, and initiated work to look at how we could protect the poorest groups in Rwanda through reprogramming funds that were no longer disbursed as general budget support.

The work I requested has now been completed and I have agreed to the reprogramming of £16 million support to Rwanda. This reprogrammed development spend will be channelled through projects that directly reach and protect the poorest people in Rwanda. In line with my earlier decision regarding the breach in the partnership principles, it is not appropriate to release any of these funds as general budget support.

The funds being released will be used to provide cash transfers and cash for work opportunities for around 545,000 of the poorest individuals and to support non-governmental organisations in Rwanda to provide essential services. We will also pay directly for 1.8 million textbooks for primary and secondary students. A further £2 million will support up to 20,000 refugees in refugee camps on the Rwanda side of the border with DRC.

Additionally, since November I have released funds for a social cash transfers programme, a scholarship scheme which focuses primarily on women and girls, and support to continue a highly successful lands registration programme.

The UK Government remain fully committed to supporting long-term solutions which bring stability and resolve the causes of conflict in eastern DRC, and will continue to work with our international and regional partners to achieve this goal.

#### 1.4 Further reading

D. Booth and F. Golooba-Mutebi, "Developmental patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda", *African Affairs*, 2012 [hard copy available on request]

[International Development Committee report on Rwanda](#), 28 November 2012 [plus supporting [press release](#)]

P. Clark, [How Rwanda judged its genocide](#), Africa Research Institute report, 2012

F. Reyntjens, [Constructing the truth, dealing with dissent, domesticating the world: governance in post-genocide Rwanda](#), *African Affairs*, 2010

J. Stearns, [From CNDP to M23](#), Rift Valley Institute report, 2012

[UN Panel of Experts final report](#), November 2012