

**Human Rights Council 31<sup>th</sup> session**

**ADOPTION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) OF RWANDA**

16 March 2016

*Speaker: Rumbi Masango*

Mr President,

Rwanda received 8 recommendations for the protection of human rights defenders: double the number received during its last review and a necessary increase given the degrading situation where defenders are harassed, intimidated, arbitrarily arrested, and even murdered, in impunity. The murder of Transparency International's Mr Makonene in 2013, for example, remains unsolved.<sup>1</sup>

The Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders emphasised that civil society participation is vital to economic development, which Rwanda has been praised for. We urge Rwanda to guarantee civil society participation in its continued development.

Journalists and political opposition are threatened and attacked for criticising the Government; suffering legal intimidation through the use of overly broad laws. This is reflected in the recommendations received by Rwanda: 12 concerning freedom of expression and 17 calling for the protection of journalists.

ISHR is concerned about the abuse of NGO laws to interfere with and undermine the activities of independent human rights organisations, as highlighted by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of association and assembly<sup>2</sup>.

While we welcome amendments to the Media Law and commitments to ensure the Genocide Law is not misused to restrict rights, we urge Rwanda to review its legal framework to ensure all laws conform with international human rights standards.

Additional crackdowns on rights occur during elections. The international community must push Rwanda to implement its UPR recommendations, to ensure the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly are not violated in the 2017 presidential election.

We draw attention to the limited Rwandan civil society representation in the room, and ask that Rwanda and the President follow-up on previous cases of intimidation and reprisals, including against Pascal Nyilibakwe, forced to flee Rwanda following threats and harassment in association with a civil society submission associated with Rwanda's previous UPR.<sup>3</sup>

Experience shows that follow-up by recommending States is crucial in ensuring recommendations are implemented. We urge States that highlighted defender protection and civil society space in Rwanda's review to do just that and support Rwanda in improving the human rights situation on the ground.

<sup>1</sup> [http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/A-HRC-26-29-Add2\\_en-final1.pdf](http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/A-HRC-26-29-Add2_en-final1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UNSR-FOAA-Annual-Report-2015\\_r.pdf](http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UNSR-FOAA-Annual-Report-2015_r.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/18session/A-HRC-18-19\\_en.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/18session/A-HRC-18-19_en.pdf)