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Rwanda: Escalating repression against political opposition

Amnesty International calls on the Rwandese government to ensure the security of individuals named in the March 2003 parliamentary commission report that requests the dissolution of the opposition *Mouvement Démocratique Républicain* (MDR), Democratic Republican Movement political party.

On 15 April the Rwandese Parliament voted to dissolve the MDR after overwhelmingly approving the parliamentary commission report that accused the MDR of propagating a "divisive" ideology. Forty-seven individuals were named in the report, including two government ministers, five deputies in the Transitional National Assembly, three high-ranking military officers and an ambassador.

"The recent purge of MDR party members and alleged supporters prior to a scheduled May constitutional referendum along with the August presidential and October parliamentary elections, is a blatant infringement of these individuals' human rights," the organization said.

The parliamentary commission's report goes beyond the dissolution of the principle opposition political party, in its attack on the *Ligue rwandaise pour la promotion et la défense des droits de l'homme*, (The Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights), LIPRODHOR - the leading independent human rights non-governmental organization in Rwanda. In a plenary session of the parliament, the parliamentary commission's Vice President accused LIPRODHOR of obtaining foreign funding for the MDR. Likewise, the media have been under pressure with journalists arrested and, or forced to flee the country for publishing editorials or political cartoons critical of the current government's actions against the MDR.

Nine years after the 1994 genocide and armed conflict, Rwanda is approaching a crossroads as the transition period defined by the Arusha Accords comes to an end. Despite the promise of new beginning, partisan restrictions on political and civil liberties are hindering national reconciliation and the transition to democracy.

The unfounded allegations against the individuals mentioned in the report appear to be part of a government-orchestrated crackdown on the political opposition. Rwandese security forces have compiled reports of clandestine meetings allegedly held by the MDR in the Kigali and Cyangugu areas to promote its "divisive" ideology, vague terminology used by the government to disenfranchise the political opposition in an election year.

The parliament's action endangers the lives and well-being of all those named in the report. One named individual, parliamentarian Dr. Leonard Hitimana, "disappeared" on 7 April. President Paul

Kagame demanded the resignation of another individual named in the report, Celestin Kabanda, Secretary of State for the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The government has publicly called for the ostracizing of these individuals from public life.

Apparently fearing for their safety, two high-ranking military officers named in the report, former Minister of Defence, Brigadier-General Emmanuel Habyarimana and the Army Representative to Parliament, Lieutenant-Colonel Balthazar Ndengeyinka, fled to Uganda on 30 March.

It is clear that relatives, staff and friends of those named in the report are also at risk. Damien Musayidizi, the Secretary to the Minister of Defence and former secretary to Emmanuel Habyarimana "disappeared" on 3 April. Major Félicien Ngirabatware, Director of the Ruhengeri Military School and personal friend of Brig. Gen Emmanuel Habyarimana, is allegedly being detained incommunicado at the Kami military detention facility in Kigali following his arrest on 1 April.

Amnesty International further calls on the Rwandese government to protect the basic rights to freedom of opinion and expression and peaceful assembly and association. These rights should be enjoyed by all peaceful political and other civil society organizations, including the MDR.

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