

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/058/2010
18 February 2010

Rwanda: Intimidation of opposition parties must end

Amnesty International has strongly condemned a worrying attack on a Rwandan opposition group as the country prepares for presidential elections in August 2010.

In a letter to Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Amnesty International urged him to use the elections as an opportunity to show the government's commitment to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

"Past elections have been marred by intimidation, however this year's vote gives Rwanda the chance to promote rights not repression," said Amnesty International's Africa Programme Deputy Director Tawanda Hondora.

The letter was prompted by a recent attack on two members of United Democratic Forces (Forces Démocratiques Unifiées, FDU-Inkingi) and harassment of the President of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (Parti Démocratique Vert du Rwanda, DGPR).

"Amnesty International is concerned that these recent incidents are part of a wider pattern of intimidation and harassment to discourage and discredit opposition groups," said Tawanda Hondora.

On 3 February, Victoire Ingabire, president of the FDU-Inkingi, and her aide Joseph Ntawangundi were attacked in the capital Kigali while collecting documents needed for the party's registration from a government building.

During the attack Victoire Ingabire's passport was stolen and Ntawangundi was severely beaten. Amnesty International welcomes the police enquiry into the incident. However, Police Spokesman Eric Kayiranga confirmed, as of 15 February, that no charges were pressed and some of those arrested had been released.

"Opening an investigation is a good first step," said Tawanda Hondora, "but an effective investigation must be prompt, impartial and bring those responsible for the attack to justice."

Three days after the incident, the New Times alleged that Ntawangundi had been convicted of genocide in absentia in 2007 by a gacaca court – a community tribunal set up to try genocide cases. He was arrested the same day, 6 February, on charges of involvement in the 1994 genocide, which left as many as 800,000 ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu dead.

A law criminalizing "genocidal ideology," whose terms are vague and ambiguous, was promulgated on 1 October 2008, unduly stifling freedom of expression. The offence is punishable by 10 to 25 years'

imprisonment.

Victoire Ingabire, has regularly been denounced in media close to the government as being “negationist” of the genocide or “divisionist” for public remarks made since her return from exile in January 2010 calling for the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against Hutu by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

The leader of the Ideal Social Party (PS-Imberakuri, PSI), Bernard Ntaganda, was also called before the Rwandan Senate to answer accusations of genocide ideology in late 2009.

“Rwanda has an obligation to prohibit speech that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence” said Tawanda Hondora, “but Rwanda’s laws on genocide ideology too often conflate legitimate political dissent with such incitement.”

Frank Habineza, the President of the Green Party, has also reported being threatened by a man he suspects to be a security agent on 4 February in a hotel in Kigali, the capital.

Habineza reported the incident to the police on 5 February and is awaiting further information on the status of investigations.

Amnesty International calls on the Rwandan government to investigate the intimidation of opposition groups, bring those responsible to justice and take immediate steps to respect the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly of opposition parties.