

**Acting Assistant Secretary Robert P. Jackson's Testimony before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,
and International Organizations
Wednesday, May 20, 2015, 2 p.m. – 5 p.m.**

Developments in Rwanda

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee,

I welcome this opportunity to discuss U.S. efforts to support the Rwandan government and people as they continue rebuilding their political, economic, and social structures following the 1994 genocide. For Rwanda, as for other countries in Africa, our policy is built around four interdependent and mutually reinforcing objectives: (1) to strengthen democratic institutions; (2) to spur economic growth, trade, and investment; (3) to advance peace and security; and (4) to promote opportunity and development. Rwanda has made enormous strides in spurring economic growth and promoting development, while we continue to encourage further progress in ensuring that Rwanda plays a constructive role in the region and respects human rights and democratic principles.

Let me talk first about Rwanda's economic and development successes. Rwanda has become a model of inclusive economic growth and a world leader in leveraging development assistance into socioeconomic gains for the vast majority of its people. The United States and Rwanda share the belief that trade, investment, technological development, and market forces are keys to Rwanda's long-term economic development. The commitment of the United States to supporting Rwanda's economic and social development is strong; USAID assistance to Rwanda's education sector more than doubled from FY 2012 to present, and many American companies and community service organizations have started operations in Rwanda in recent years. We have been proud to partner with Rwanda over the past decade as its economy has grown at an average of over 7 per cent per year, as its infant and child mortality rates have been halved, and as HIV and malaria rates have been reduced dramatically with help from the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), respectively.

With regard to Rwanda's contribution to regional peace and security, I would highlight that Rwanda is one of the world's most active and effective UN peacekeepers – the fifth largest contributor of troops in the world despite its small size and population. Its peacekeepers serve in many of the world's most complicated conflicts, including the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Darfur, and frequently distinguish themselves by a willingness to take strong action to protect civilians under imminent threat of violence. We have recognized Rwanda's leading role in peacekeeping through its designation as a priority partner in President Obama's Africa Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership. At the same time, we continue to encourage Rwanda to play a constructive role in the Great Lakes region, and were pleased when Rwanda ended its support to the M23 rebellion in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and supported the Nairobi declarations that ended that conflict. We share Rwanda's continued concerns over the presence in eastern DRC of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) armed

group and are encouraging the DRC government, together with the UN peacekeeping operation, MONUSCO, to carry out an effective counterinsurgency effort against this abhorrent armed group. In the current crisis in Burundi, we have urged all countries in the region, including Rwanda, not to take unilateral actions and to work through multilateral frameworks to support a peaceful resolution to the internal conflict stemming from Burundian President Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term in violation of the Arusha Accord.

Unfortunately, however, Rwanda's record on building democratic institutions and ensuring full respect for human rights is mixed. In response to and to protect against further destructive cycles of mass violence, the Rwandan government has developed a strong state with an intense commitment to internal safety and security, national unity, and socioeconomic development. As a result, on the positive side, Rwanda is a country with low corruption and a strong record for combatting corruption, demanding high accountability and performance from its public officials, and ensuring prosecution for those who break the law. Violent crime rates are extremely low and have been dropping consistently over the past decade. Rwanda is a leader in combatting trafficking in persons, having put in place a comprehensive nationwide anti-trafficking plan that it is aggressively implementing with NGOs and partners. Rwanda is also a leader in promoting the rights of disabled persons, and especially for elevating women to positions of leadership in government. With 63 percent of its parliament female, Rwanda boasts the highest number of women lawmakers anywhere in the world. The rights of LGBTI persons are respected. Rwanda has extended universal health care and access to free education through the high school level to all of its citizens, and it is working to establish electrical and internet connections for all its people both as a tool for education and as a necessary accelerator for economic development. These accomplishments are essential to the Government of Rwanda's vision for the development of the country and its people.

There is also another side to the security coin, however. Activities that are seen by the government as possible threats to national security or the political dominance of the governing Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) are often met with intolerance and harsh punishment. In some of these cases suspected wrongdoers are submitted to the Rwandan judicial system in a transparent manner, but in other cases they are not. Over the past year, Rwandans have quietly reported the disappearance and suspected deaths of family members at the hands of the Rwandan security services. These reports come from a wide cross-section of Rwandan society, cutting across geographical, socioeconomic, and ethnic lines.

In recent years domestic human rights organizations have found it increasingly difficult to monitor and report on human rights violations and abuses. Among international human rights organizations, only Human Rights Watch maintains a permanent presence in Rwanda. Its staff report surveillance and occasional harassment by government officials and security services.

Restrictions on press freedoms in Rwanda continue to be a serious concern. In 2013 Rwanda announced forward-leaning media reforms that empowered journalists to self-regulate content and accreditation. In the past year, despite positive steps forward—such as the establishment of an independent media commission and radio debates that encourage citizens to discuss controversial subjects—press freedoms continue to be restricted. Journalists report that editors ensure content supports government policy, and some journalists have been detained or

threatened for reporting deemed to be critical of the government. The Rwandan government shut down the BBC-Kinyarwanda broadcasts because of a controversial documentary about President Kagame and the genocide. We are concerned that, since establishing the Rwanda Media Commission as an independent body, the government has interfered with its work, undermined its role as the sole regulator of media content, and at times threatened commissioners.

These human rights concerns are part and parcel of our ongoing dialogue with the Rwandan government. We have and will continue to raise these issues at all levels of the Rwandan government. We previously issued several public statements related to our human rights concerns: we publicly expressed concern in January 2014 about the succession of what appeared to be politically motivated killings of government critics in exile; we expressed concern in June 2014 about the arrest, incommunicado detentions, and disappearances of scores of Rwandan citizens; in September 2014 we called for an independent investigation of the bodies found in July and August in Lake Rweru, which sits astride the Rwanda-Burundi border; and in October 2014, following the suspension of BBC's Kinyarwanda broadcasts, we publicly urged the government to protect the freedoms of press and speech as the cornerstones of democracy.

We are also concerned that political competition in Rwanda continues to be limited. There are eleven registered political parties in Rwanda. Ten are aligned with the ruling RPF in a government of consensus. Only one—the Democratic Green Party—advocates for policy alternatives and has taken a position against the removal of term limit provisions in the Constitution. The Green Party holds no seats in Parliament. It was unable to compete in previous elections because authorities took years to approve the party's documentary submissions required by regulation to register as a political party. Green Party leaders report that members are regularly harassed and threatened by local officials. Other opposition parties have sought registration but have been stymied by procedural delays and changing registration requirements. We believe democracy is strengthened by inclusive political processes and active debate between parties and citizens. We continue to encourage the Rwandan government to ensure protection of political freedoms, particularly in the lead up to elections.

The upcoming 2017 presidential election will be pivotal for Rwanda's future. Our consistent message to President Kagame and the Government of Rwanda – as it has been with other leaders in Africa facing elections – is that political space should be opened to opposition parties that embrace peaceful, democratic dialogue and transition. This includes ensuring freedom of expression, press freedoms, the ability of citizens to criticize the government and ruling party, and the ability of all to campaign freely for the candidates and causes they believe in. Intimidation and harassment of human rights organizations and journalists is unacceptable, and security services should ensure the rights of all citizens are upheld within the boundaries of the law and justice system. We also believe that neither parties nor individuals should seek to change constitutions to extend their terms in office for personal or political gain. This is a principle that we uphold throughout the world. As we are sadly witnessing in Burundi, there are serious negative consequences when one group limits the ability of others to participate fully in the political process. In our view, the best way to ensure long-term stability and prevent violence is by making sure that all peaceful voices are allowed to speak and be heard.

So, while we applaud Rwanda's great development success, we should not ignore the need for strong and transparent democratic institutions that will lay the foundation for long-term stability and economic growth. However, as Rwandans have shown by building such a strong and dynamic country over the course of two decades, they have the ability to meet difficult challenges beyond all expectations. We will continue to work in close partnership with Rwanda to help them build the prosperous and democratic country that they seek.

Thank you.