

Testimony of Major, Robert Higiroy: Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
U.S. House of Representatives
Sept, 27th 2017.

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, Members of the Subcommittee, Ladies and Gentlemen.
Good afternoon.

Thank you very much for inviting me here once again, as I had the privilege of addressing you in May 2015. I want to thank you for what the government of the United States did for me after I appeared before this Committee two years ago. In my 2015 testimony, I gave details of how, after serving as a major in the Rwandan military, the Rwandan intelligence had offered me US\$1 million to assassinate General Kayumba Nyamwasa and Colonel Patrick Karegeya who had fled Rwanda to South Africa. The repression of critical voices inside Rwanda, dissidents and real or perceived critics outside the country in neighboring Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, South Africa and Europe have been victims of attacks and threats. In connection with my testimony of 2015 the United States' officials relocated me to the United States after learning that the government of Rwanda was attempting to kill me in Belgium. I have since been living in the United States and am most thankful for the generosity of the American people.

Mr Chairman, since 2015, the government of Rwanda has become increasingly authoritarian and violent. Its security forces continue to murder Rwandans and destabilize neighboring countries.

In May 2015, I mentioned the extra-judicial assassinations of Patrick Karegeya in South Africa, but also of Assinapol Rwigara, a Rwandan businessman and Dr Emmanuel Gasakure, the private cardiologist of President Kagame, both killed in Rwanda. These assassinations are linked to the corruption of the regime. President Kagame owns all businesses in the country, either through private companies held by front men or through companies belonging to the ruling party, primarily Crystal Ventures. Any individual challenging this state of affair or competing with President's Kagame business interests is eliminated. Since then the families of these men were harassed. Five members of Patrick Karegeya's family disappeared, allegedly secretly detained: Gorette Kabuto, Mutsinzi Eric, Mwine Amos, Kabanza Edward and Gashaija Jotham. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Kabanza Edward may have been killed. Recently, Diane Rwigara, who publicly opposed President Kagame and denounced these murders was arrested together with her mother and two siblings.

Members of opposition parties and the media also continue to "disappear." For example, Illuminee Iragena, a member of the unregistered United Democratic Forces (FDU)-Inkingi party, disappeared in 2015. Unconfirmed reports suggest she was killed in detention. In August 2017, the entire leadership of this FDU party vanished. Members or sympathizers of the Rwanda National Congress (RNC), the political party working outside Rwanda are systematically targeted.

The 2016 State Department's Human Rights report confirmed unlawful killings in the country. An increasing number of people have disappeared or have been reported missing since May 2015 in Rwanda. Many of the cases occurred in Rubavu district, in Western Province. According to

Human Rights Watch reports, most of these people were detained by Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) soldiers and we believe they are in military custody. Witnesses saw the executive secretary of Gisenyi sector, Honoré Mugisha, taking part in arrests of people who were forcibly kidnapped together with security agents. Imam Mohamed Mugemangango was shot and killed while he was in custody – At least half a dozen of people have been murdered by the security forces while in prison.

Extrajudicial killings recently increased as the security forces cleared the capital city of Kigali and major towns of poor people, unemployed, and the homeless. Authorities are rounding up poor people and arbitrarily detaining them in “transit centers” across the country. In its 2017 report, Human Rights Watch proved chilling details of extrajudicial killing of 37 Rwandans suspected of petty offences such as stealing bananas, a cow, or a motorcycle in Rwanda’s Western Province between July 2016 and March 2017. Soldiers arbitrarily arrested and shot most of the victims, in what appears to be an officially sanctioned strategy. These killings, carried out by and with the backing of state agents, are a blatant violation of both Rwandan law and international human rights law.

Rwanda's destabilization of neighboring countries has also not stopped, particularly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Burundi. In 2013 in DRC, Rwanda disarmed over 770 M23 Congolese rebel combatants it had previously sponsored to take over the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo. After the defeat of M23, over 770 crossed into Rwanda and were detained in Ngoma. According to the 2016 State Department, the 770 combatants mysteriously vanished. There can be no doubt about their role- they are Rwanda’s proxy army used to destabilize the neighbors.

In the case of Burundi, Rwanda stand accused of recruiting Burundian refugees into the armed groups who seek to overthrow the government of President Pierre Nkurunziza. In its report, “Asylum Betrayed: Recruitment of Burundian Refugees in Rwanda”, Refugees International rebuked Rwanda in the following terms: “The Rwandan government must act at once to ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum and protect refugees from recruitment by non-state armed actors. To that end, it must ensure that all efforts to recruit Burundian refugees into armed groups-whether on or emanating from Rwandan territory, and whether committed by Burundian or Rwandan nationals- cease immediately. Rwanda must also affirm publicly that the recruitment of refugees into non-state armed groups on its territory is a violation of international and Rwandan law.”

Mr Chairman, the Rwandan security forces pretend to defend human rights as peacekeepers in other countries, yet they kill their own people. Today, the Rwanda security forces are fractious and unstable. Many high ranking officers are detained: four military colonels, Colonel Claude Mugabo, Gishaije Emmanuel, Peter Kalimba and Emmanuel Rugazora were recently arrested and taken to unknown locations. Their Commander in chief, General. Paul Kagame is always seen wearing bulletproof vests and is surrounded by a wall of security. He openly acknowledges violence against Rwandan people. In June 2014, for instance, after the U.S State Department said it was deeply concerned by the arrests and disappearance of dozens of Rwandans, Kagame had the following to say: "Those who talk about disappearances... we will continue to arrest more suspects and if possible shoot them in broad daylight those who intend to destabilize our

country". Mr. Chairman, if Rwanda's strong man is himself afraid of his own people and military, what is he afraid of? On most grounds Rwanda is back where it was in the months before the 1994 genocide. Are we going to blame ourselves again for not having taken action?

Mr Chairman, I conclude by thanking you once again for conducting this congressional hearing on Rwanda. We trust that the United States, being the main donor to Rwanda, will make its support conditional to ending terror on its own people and on the people on the region.