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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Arbitrary detention in Rwanda

Rwanda has achieved remarkable economic growth in recent years. However, this was not accompanied by real political development, as it did not respect many political human rights. Arbitrary detention operations carried out by the Rwandan government confirm the narrow political environment under which journalists and human rights defenders operate. Therefore, the Elizka Relief Foundation sheds light on a number of recent developments regarding arbitrary detention in the country, and urges the Human Rights Council to pressure the Rwandan government to stop these practice.

The most prominent arbitrary detentions in Rwanda

Elizka Relief Foundation expresses its grave concern about the continuing arbitrary detentions by the Rwandan government, and we note the following:

On November 27, 2019, "Jackie Umuhoza", the daughter of the exiled pastor Dio Nerejira, was arrested from home in Kigali by officers of Rwanda Investigation Berea (RIB). Jackie should have been detained for only five days after her arrest prior to her appearance before a judge. After a public examination of the case, the Criminal Investigation Department stated that she is being held in accordance with an anti-terrorism law that allows for detention for up to 90 days without charge, and which requires approval of detention by the prosecutor every 15 days. However, the investigative department spokesperson refused to confirm whether the public prosecutor had reviewed her detention at first, until the authorities admitted to hold her.¹

In February 2020, concerns were raised about the arrest of forcibly displaced children. The issue is still existing despite the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child urging the Rwandan government to end violations that include beatings and stop the arbitrary detention of children. Rwanda had introduced a system of transit centers in 2017. In those centers, people rounded up in the streets for such conduct as prostitution, drug use, begging, vagrancy or informal street vending can be held for up to two months. However, homeless children are also placed in these centers in a manner that poses a danger to them. Although there are 28 transit centers in Rwanda, the National Commission for Children and the National Commission for Human Rights have denounced the transit centers. However, the Rwandan government had denied all these accusations.²

Also, On February 17, the world woke up to the disturbing news of the death of Kizito Mihigo, 38, a Rwandan gospel music artist and arguably the country's most visible cultural figure. Mihigo was first arrested after the song was released in April 2014, but police said the song had nothing to do with his incarceration. He was found dead in a prison cell in Kigali, the country's capital, after being detained for three days in Kigali prison.³

In April 2020, the Rwandan government launched a campaign of arbitrary arrests on journalists that ended up with seven of them behind bars for doing their work. The journalist are Theo Nsingimana from "Umubavu TV", Evan Mogesha from "The East African", John Jahamani from "The New Times", Saul Butera from "Bloomberg", Valentine Moherwa and David Berengero from "AFRIMAX TV". And Deodon Nyonsenga (Ishema TV), who was arrested on April 15, 2020, along with his driver, Fidel Komizusing.⁴

The Rwandan Bureau of Investigation (RIB) accuses them of violating the lockdown measures imposed in Rwanda to combat the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the real

¹ Rwanda admits to hold Jackie Umuhoza, one of kidnapped pastors", softpower News, 28 November, available at: <https://bit.ly/3fY0t0A>.

² Phyllis Birori, Rwanda: Abuse of Detained Street Kids Triggers Concern, alla Africa, February 17, 2020, available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202002190310.html>.

³ Charles Wachir, Rwanda: Political opposition persists amid death, disappearance and detention, Toward freedom, April 7, 2020, available at: <https://towardfreedom.org/story/rwanda-political-opposition-persists-amid-death-disappearance-and-detention/>.

⁴ Rwanda: The Coronavirus Pandemic Is Not an Excuse to Trample on Freedom of Press.", April 16, 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/31VXv7J>.

reason behind their arrest is their continuous reports and coverage that shed light on the suffering of journalists.

This is an example of the persecution, harassment, violence and restrictions on freedom of expression that Rwandan journalists, especially those working for non-governmental media, are suffering from.

Recommendations

Elizka Relief Foundation recommends that stakeholders:

1. Immediately stop using arbitrary detention as a means to silence all voices of opposition, regardless of its affiliations.
 2. To stop pursuing influential artists, clerics, and thinkers, not to abuse their families, and to guarantee freedom of thought, expression and belief for every citizen.
 3. To immediately release the above-named journalists, and not to confuse those who make the news with those who cover it.
 4. Stop invoking Covid-19 and precautionary measures, and respect all human rights.
 5. Investigate the killing of Kizito Mihigo in prison, and share the findings of the investigations, while speeding up the accountability of the perpetrators.
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