

Chapter 2

Political Background

Early History

The area presently occupied by Rwanda has been inhabited since the 1300s. By the 17th century a kingdom was established inhabited by Hutus, Tutsis and Twa. Rwanda first became a German protectorate in 1884, and under the name Ruanda-Urundi, became part of German East Africa in 1890. After the First World War, it came under Belgian administration under a League of Nations mandate, and after World War II Ruanda-Urundi became a UN trust territory with Belgium as the administrative authority.

Towards Independence

After the Second World War, Rwanda continued to be administered by Belgium. In 1959, as the independence movement gathered pace, the ruling Tutsi elite formed a political party, Union Nationale Rwandaise. The Belgian authorities encouraged the Hutu majority also to aspire to political power and, in the same year, a rival party, Parti de l'émancipation du peuple Hutu (Parmehutu), was established.

As the 1960 local elections approached, Parmehutu initiated a Hutu uprising resulting in the death of many Tutsis and forcing King Kigeri V and tens of thousands of Tutsis to flee into exile in Uganda and Burundi. In 1961 the monarchy was abolished.

Independent Rwanda

Rwanda achieved independence from Belgium in 1962, with Parmehutu leader Gregoire Kayibanda as President; many more Tutsis left the country and those who remained faced continuing state-sponsored violence and institutionalised discrimination. The most serious eruption of violence at this time was triggered in 1963 by an incursion from Burundi of exiled Rwandan Tutsis and resulted in the death of at least 15,000 Tutsis at the hands of Hutu gangs.

President Kayibanda was overthrown in 1973 in a military coup led by army Chief of Staff Major General Juvénal Habyarimana. There then ensued a period of military rule, until 1978, when a new Constitution was promulgated and Maj Gen Habyarimana became President.

Civil War

In 1990 forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), who had mobilised themselves in Uganda, entered the country and a civil war began. Though predominantly a Tutsi-backed movement, the RPF did win the support of a significant element of moderate Hutus. A new Constitution promoting multiparty democracy was introduced in 1991. Peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania in August 1993 resulted in a power-sharing agreement between President Habyarimana and the RPF, known as the Arusha Accords.

1994 Genocide

In April 1994 an aircraft carrying President Habyarimana and the Burundian President, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was shot down on its return from Arusha to Kigali, killing all the passengers. The President's violent death triggered the co-ordinated massacre of Tutsis – and some Hutus who opposed the government – by Hutu militia and elements of the Rwandan army. An estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in the months following the plane crash. In response, the RPF began a major offensive from the north.

Post-Genocide Rwanda

In July 1994 the RPF took control of Kigali and formed an administration based on the principles of power-sharing, consensus building and national reconciliation, which were also the basis of the 1993 Arusha Accords.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) established a Government of National Unity with four other political parties, the Christian Democratic Party, Liberal Party, Republican Democratic Movement and Social Democratic Party. Pasteur Bizimungu was inaugurated as President for a five-year term; the RPF military chief, Major General Paul Kagame, became Vice-President and Defence Minister. The government's priorities were security, rebuilding the economy and national reconciliation; it prohibited any official recognition of ethnicity.

Shortly after the new government took office, a 70-member Transitional National Assembly was formed, including representatives of the five governing parties and three other smaller parties, the Democratic Union for Rwandese People, Islamic Party and Socialist Party, as well as six representatives of the Rwandese Patriotic Army.

The 2003 Constitution formally ended the Government of National Unity, and created an array of new governance features. The Constitution limits the ruling party to a maximum of 50 per cent of Cabinet seats, with the rest divided proportionately among other parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies. A political party is required to obtain at least 5 per cent of the votes cast in Legislative Elections to be represented in the Chamber of Deputies. Only the Rwanda Patriotic Front, Social Democratic Party and Liberal Party achieved this threshold in the September 2008 Legislative Elections, thereby gaining representation in the Chamber of Deputies, and hence Cabinet. The Constitution provides that the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and the President of the Senate are chosen from parties other than that of the President. The Constitution also provides that at least 30 per cent of the members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate shall be women.

Exodus of Hutus

In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, some elements of the Rwanda Government Forces and the Hutu militia retreated into Zaire, taking with them two million Hutus, and they were accommodated in UN refugee camps. Many other Hutus fled to Tanzania. By 1995 the Hutu militias and Zairean government forces were initiating attacks on Zairean Banyamulenge Tutsis who lived in Eastern Zaire. In October 1996 Rwandan troops and Zairean Tutsis attacked Hutu militias in the refugee camps where they were based, with the aim of disarming the militia and repatriating the refugees. In 1997 the Zairean regime was overthrown, Laurent Kabila became President, and the country renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, in 1998, when it was clear that the new government of DRC was not going to return the Hutu militias to Rwanda, Rwanda began to lend its support to forces that opposed President Kabila.

In July 2002 Rwanda and the DRC agreed that Rwanda would withdraw its troops and DRC would work with Rwanda in disarming Hutu militia. By October 2002 Rwanda reported it had completed its withdrawal, and in March 2005 the main Hutu rebel group, Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), announced the end of its armed struggle. However, some elements of the FDLR remain committed to a genocide ideology and also to violently overthrowing the Rwandan government.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

The UN Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in November 1994 to contribute to the process of national reconciliation and to the maintenance of peace in the region. The tribunal was established in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, in February 1995, for the prosecution of those responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda during 1994.

On 29 June 2010, the United Nations Security Council agreed to extend the terms of office of five permanent and nine ad litem Judges who are members of the Trial Chambers until 31 December 2011 or completion of their assignments, if sooner. The terms of office of the two Permanent Judges of the Appeals Chamber were extended until 31 December 2012 or until the completion of the cases to which they are assigned, if sooner.

Paul Kagame's Presidency

In April 2000, Pasteur Bizimungu was succeeded as President by Paul Kagame. Following endorsement of a new Constitution by referendum in May 2003, RPF leader President Kagame won the Presidential Election in August 2003, with 95 per cent of votes, and the RPF won the country's first multiparty parliamentary elections in September 2003, with 40 of the 53 directly elected seats and 74 per cent of votes. The Social Democratic Party took seven seats and the Liberal Party six; turnout was nearly 100 per cent.

Former President Bizimungu received a 15-year jail sentence for embezzlement and inciting violence in June 2004; he was released in April 2007 when he received a Presidential Pardon.

In November 2007 Rwanda signed a peace agreement with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), under which the DRC was to hand over those implicated in the 1994 genocide to Rwanda and the ICTR.

2008 Parliamentary Elections

In the parliamentary elections of September 2008 the RPF was returned, taking 42 seats and 79 per cent of votes; the Social Democratic Party won seven seats and the Liberal Party four. Turnout was again close to 100 per cent.

Recent Political Developments

The application of the Republic of Rwanda for membership of the Commonwealth was considered by Heads of Government in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in November 2009. This was done in accordance with the criteria and procedures agreed at their meeting in Kampala in 2007. At the end of their deliberations, on 28 November 2009, they warmly welcomed Rwanda into the Commonwealth family as its 54th member.

The Kagame Administration can rightfully claim credit for Rwanda's substantial progress in security, the economy, health, education, infrastructure, strengthened agricultural output, rebuilt institutions, poverty reduction, tackling corruption, promoting women's rights and an environmentally friendly agenda, national reconciliation and engaging the international community.

However, there have also been some tensions in Rwanda, partly fuelled by a number of political developments and incidents this year that have attracted international attention this year, that had a bearing or impact on the political space and environment surrounding the Presidential election.

Political Parties

There are ten registered political parties. The Government of Rwanda places a strong emphasis on consensus and national unity in politics. All registered political parties are required (Article 58 of the Constitution) to join the Consultative Forum of Political Organisations in Rwanda, where parties meet to discuss government policies and promote consensus. Parties are prohibited by law from organising on an ethnic, regional or religious basis. The most recent political party to be registered is the Social Party Imberakuri (PS - Imberakuri), which was registered in July 2009.

The ten registered parties are:

- Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF Inkotanyi)
- Liberal Party (PL)
- Union Démocratique du Peuple Rwandais (UPDR)
- Ideal Democratic Party (PDI)
- Social Democratic Party (PSD)
- Parti du Progrès et de la Concorde (PPC)
- Centrist Democratic Party (PDC)
- Parti Socialiste Rwandais Party (PSR)
- Solidarity for Solidarity and Progress Party (PSP)
- Social Party Imberakuri (PS - Imberakuri)

Article 27 of the organic law governing political organisations and politicians, of 27 June 2003 stipulates that: "During an electoral year, Government shall, in its budget, provide for grants to political organisations and independent candidates for their campaigns. The grant is only given to political organisations and independent candidates who have obtained at least 5 per cent of the electoral votes".

However, on an annual basis, activities of political organisations are supported by the Consultative Forum of Political Organisations in Rwanda, whose budget is provided by the Government of Rwanda.