



AMAHORO - FDU INKINGI - RNC PLATFORM

CHANGING ARTICLE 101 OF THE RWANDAN CONSTITUTION IS A RECIPE TO ENTRENCH ONE PARTY RULE AND A PATHWAY TO INSTABILITY

The decision of RPF party to endorse the change of article 101 in order to enable incumbent president Kagame to run for a third term is a betrayal of the true wish of the population and a dangerous move.

While there is a general consensus in Africa and elsewhere that the future stability and sustainable economic development of the continent depends on building strong institutions and not strong men, the Rwandan regime is driving Rwandans in a reverse gear to build the cult of one strong man President Kagame. Like in religious ceremonies, the so called citizens' representatives have been streaming to Parliament to hand over signatures on petitions asking for the change of article 101 in order to allow President Kagame to seek a third term in Office. It is alleged that 3.7 million Rwandans representing 72% of eligible voters, civil servants, students, youth movements, women groups have written petitions to Parliament for the change of the constitutions. They also include prisoners.

Article 101 states that “Under no circumstances shall a person hold the office of President of Republic for more than two terms”. It is an open secret that citizens are forced to sign the said petitions and we have evidence. Some people have even been arrested for hesitating or refusing to bend to pressure and sign the petitions.

We are quite encouraged by the statement of the US Department of State and the stand of certain African leaders including President Zuma of South Africa, Ghana Vice President Kwesi Amissah-Arthur as well as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, HE Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma rejecting changes in the Constitutions to accommodate the wishes of incumbent Presidents. We expect other governments to do the same if they are to be taken seriously. We hope that the stand taken towards Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo will be applied to every country without fear or favours.

The reasons officially given for the need to change the constitution to allow President Kagame to stand again is that he ended genocide, brought stability and promoted economic progress, and that he has no match among Rwandans. Some have even gone as far as considering President Kagame as “a twin brother of Jesus Christ”, son of God in Christianity, hence raising him to the level of a deity. By implication, as a deity the next step is to build him a monument and declare him President for life.

Such a stand is an offence not only to the dignity of all Rwandans as an intelligent, hardworking and well educated people but also to the dignity of Africa as a growing democracy. We know that all Rwandans can rightfully claim ownership of the prevailing economic achievements. Moreover, long term social and economic progress is linked to the rule of law, political and civil freedoms, a vibrant civil society and independent media, all of which are lacking in Rwanda today. The much celebrated economic progress, although with glaring and growing inequalities, did not start with Kagame's reign nor will it end with it. Most importantly, this social and economic progress can be stopped and reversed in the event the current crisis of governance, if it remains unresolved peacefully, leads to another cataclysmic upheaval.

We are quite conscious that contrary to the general belief, the cycle of political violence in Rwanda is due to violent competition for power and the use of force to maintain it. It is quite tragic that since independence, all Presidents have been removed by violent means. We have to work to end this culture of political violence and foster the goodwill of every peace loving person.

As Tom Malinowski, the Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Human Rights and Labor/US State Department puts it, term limits encourage leaders to focus on leaving a good legacy, instead of perpetuating their own power or building a personal guard or secret police. They encourage them to invest in strong institutions such as the justice system, a fair economic system, the schools, a health care system for all and a fair and transparent electoral system as they know they'll have to eventually leave power. Moreover term limits make it harder to build systems of patronage and corruption by ensuring political turnover, and they give new generations the opportunity to be leaders. The Rwandan people deserve no less.

Our political organisations reject the political manipulation of citizens to consolidate the President's personal power and that of his inner circle and condemn unreservedly the repressive dictatorship of the RPF party

Our political organisations call upon peace loving people and friends of Rwanda to help end this cycle of violence by putting pressure on President Kagame to respect the constitution.

We ask the international community to apply the same pressure across the Great lakes region in combating the trend to change constitutions to meet the wishes of incumbents.

We would like to warn the international community that Rwanda's apparent stability is deceptive because it hides deep seated tensions, unresolved issues, and a totalitarian regime which contains them only through violence. Condoning it is a green light to continue and to condemn all Rwandans to an uncertain, unstable, and possibly violent, future.

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