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COMITE DIRECTEUR – STEERING COMMITTEE

"Pour un Etat de Droit, la Démocratie et l'Egalité de chances" ; "For the rule of law, democracy and equal opportunity"



POOR NEIGHBOURHOODS IN RWANDAN CAPITAL KIGALI RAISED TO THE GROUND AS PART OF A CLEANING UP EXERCISE FOR COMMONWEALTH SUMMIT.

The Rwandan capital Kigali authorities, keen to show case the Rwandan capital as the cleanest, safest in Africa: no street vendors, no beggars, no shabbily dressed people walking the streets to disturb the peace and irritate the sight of distinguished guests from the Commonwealth, are [demolishing houses in poor neighbourhoods](#) to get rid of the hideout of the excluded from the Rwandan economic miracle. The initial deadline to vacate the area was set at 15 days but later reduced to 2 or 3 days due to the short time to the summit in June 2020. The summit matters most to the ruling party and President Kagame. It is all about image; case showing the *"Singapore of Africa"*. The authorities allege that these areas are unsafe due to alleged potential flooding or landslides. The zeal and timing bely the official claims because some have lived in these areas for decades without a problem. They have land titles. They were allowed to do renovation just before elections on constitutional change in 2015.

People with personal houses are given ninety thousand francs (96 US dollars) and those who tenants are given thirty thousand francs (32 US dollars) to look for accommodation elsewhere. This job is not done by bulldozers but by other poor neighbours too desperate to get a job even when it means destroying houses of people that they know.

[The demolishers raid the neighbourhoods at any time of the day and don't care whether the landlord is present or not to remove their personal property.](#) There is no empathy for the children and the elderly as it is a rainy season now, or for the sick. A single mum was filmed with a 12-year-old stunted and mentally disabled child sitting on the rubble of their demolished house.

What is disturbing is that appalling violation of human rights is done for the comfort of the delegates of the Commonwealth and that the holding of the summit in Rwanda is an endorsement of Rwanda government's commitment to [the core values of the Commonwealth](#) including respect for human rights.

[Today Rwanda is classified as not free by Freedom House with a score of 23%](#) regarding the respect of political and civil rights. There is no better illustration of the bad human rights record and of the outcome of impurity than the ease with which the Rwandan regime is destroying people's property without compensation or empathy for the vulnerable children and the elderly.

We would like to recall that the [Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative had concluded in a report of July before the admission of Rwanda in December 2009](#) that *"the state of governance and human rights in Rwanda does not satisfy Commonwealth standards"*.

However, some members including Canada shrugged off fears over Rwanda's rights record adding that the Commonwealth is well positioned to assist Rwanda in strengthening its democratic institutions. [This has never been the case until now.](#)

[Just a few examples of human rights violations after Rwanda became member of the Commonwealth:](#) in the 2010 general elections the key challenger Mrs Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza was arrested, the Vice President of the Green Party was found beheaded, many newspapers were shut down, journalists killed or disappeared. In the presidential elections of 2017 another serious challenger Ms Diane Rwigara was arrested and another presidential hopeful Mwenenda was just lucky to get out safe. Many members of FDU-Inkingi are in jail, murdered or mysteriously disappeared. Mr Deo Mushayidi, President of PDP Imanzi and Dr Niyitegeka of MDR party are languishing in prison. Human life has become so cheap that people are shot dead for stealing a bunch of bananas or smuggling a sack of beans across the border with Uganda. The ruling party RPF bulldozed the change of the constitution to allow President Kagame to rule Rwanda up to 2034, which would be unacceptable elsewhere. Sadly, this bad record and the score of 23% in respect of human rights seems not to be bad enough for Rwanda to disqualify to hold the commonwealth summit.

The holding of the summit in Kigali will serve to illustrate the place of morality and human rights in international politics and will encourage repression in the Commonwealth countries.

It is our very considered view that the Commonwealth will have lost the moral authority and its former glory as a bastion of democratic values and human rights which we also cherish and would like to be party of.

Even at this eleventh hour we call on the Commonwealth to raise at least a finger and tell Kigali that the inhumane cleaning up exercise of the poor from the capital city is contrary to Commonwealth values.

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