

Brussels, 18 December 2015

Dear High Representative,

After 16 years of exile in the Netherlands, Ms. Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, president of the Unified Democratic Forces FDU-Inkingi, a coalition of Rwandan opposition parties, returned to Rwanda to run for presidential elections scheduled for August 2010. On 14th October she was arrested after weeks of police harassment, intimidation and media lynching, charged with genocide ideology, genocide denial, and conspiracy against the regime. Charges commonly used to silence any opposition in a country where freedom of expression is severely curtailed.

After a flawed trial, condemned among others by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Foundation Jean Jaurès, she was sentenced in first 8 years in prison. On appeal, the sentence was increased to 15 years. Yet, the Supreme Court had invalidated some of the evidences used to convict her in the first place.

Having lost all confidence in the justice of her country led by an authoritarian regime, she filed an application with the African Court of Human Rights and Peoples based in Arusha, Tanzania.

Nominated for Sakharov Prize in 2012, the fate of this mother, nicknamed by her followers as the Rwandan Aung San Suu Kyi, should challenge us. Pursuant to the resolution of our Parliament 2013/2641 (RSP) of 25 May 2013, we ask the European Commission to officially request the immediate release of Madam Ingabire. In the meantime, we urge the Commission to take action to improve her prison conditions by ensuring, among others, a free and easy access to legal counsel and her recognition as a political prisoner. We stress the urgent need of periodic visits of EU observers to evaluate the situation.

The case of Ms Victoire Ingabire is just the tip of the iceberg. On Friday 4th December 2015, her party deputy, Boniface Twagirimana, narrowly escaped a kidnap attempt. Thanks to the quick reaction of bystanders, he was taken to a police station where he spent 24 hours before being released without charges, since the kidnap attempt had been thwarted. This crackdown on opposition comes in the wake of a constitutional review referendum scheduled on 18 December 2015 that will allow the incumbent president to stay in power for another 17 years at least, contrary to the constitution which limits his term in office to two terms.

In this vein, we ask the commission to take further action beyond a mere disapproval in its dealing with the regime and formally condemn this new move to organize a referendum on the Constitutional change with such short notice, moreover in a climate of political repression.

Faithfully yours,

Lola Sánchez Caldentey
Rosa Estaràs Ferragut
Jordi Sebastià
Juan Carlos Girauta Vidal
Estefanía Torres
Miguel Urbán
Xavier Benito
Fabio de Masi
Tania Gonzalez
Reinhard Bütikofer
Maria Heubuch
Yanick Jadot
Ernest Urtasun
Ernest Maragall
José Bové
Karima Delli
Josep-Maria Terricabras
Julia Reda
Jean Lambert
Bart Staes
Marie-Christine Vergiat

Pascal Durand
Ian Hudghton
Tatjana Zdanoka
Bronis Ropè
Stelios Kouloglou
Ana María Gomes
Norbert Neuser
Barbara Spinelli
Luis de Grandes Pascual
Kostadinka Kuneva
Michèle Rivasi
Terry Reintke
António Marinho e Pinto
Gabi Zimmer
Ivo Vajgl
Laura Ferrara
José Inácio Faria
Dimitrios Papadimoulis
Marlene Mizzi
Beatriz Becerra
Izascun Bilbao

Liliana Rodrigues
Malin Björk
Teresa Gimenez barbat
Hilde Vautmans
Kostas Chrysogonos
Doru Frunzulica
Santiago Fisas Aixelà
Claude Rolin
Jean-Luc Schaffhauser
Elly Schlein
Merja Kyllönen
Stefan Eck
Nathalie Griesbeck
Ignazio Corrao
Fabio Massimo Castaldo
Ramona Manescu
Brando Benifei
Javier Nart
María Teresa Giménez
Francesc Gambús
Nessa Childers
Johannes Cornelis Van Baalen