



Charles Michel, President of the Council of Europe, and Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, Rome, October 2021

United States of America criticizes EU for its close cooperation with Paul Kagame's authoritarian regime in Rwanda

- During her time in Brussels last Friday (November 19), Samantha Power, Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), left criticism of the European Union for its close cooperation with the regime of Paul Kagame, who has ruled Rwanda with an iron fist since 2000¹.

¹ <https://www.devex.com/news/samantha-power-says-rwanda-lacks-environment-that-allows-criticism-102147>

“I don’t think there is an environment on the ground that allows for criticism, or that there is a pluralistic party development, or even criteria that you would have in any textbook for a liberal democracy,” said Samantha Power², after a meeting with European Union Foreign Affairs Chief Josep Borrell and European Union Development Ministers.

Senior European Union officials have been traveling regularly to Rwanda as part of Europe’s efforts to build a new partnership with Africa, thereby reducing the threat of Chinese influence on the continent. In fact, the European Union is working closely with Rwanda, through the African Union, to set up a COVID-19 vaccine factory in that Central African country.

The implementation of an anti-COVID-19 immunizer factory in Rwanda is part of the “Team Europe” initiative announced in May by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, which aims at manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines, and health technologies in Africa. With the initiative, the European bloc aims to help create an enabling environment for vaccine manufacturing in Africa and address barriers on both the supply and demand side. The initiative is budgeted at 1 billion euros to be disbursed by the European Union and European development finance institutions such as the European Investment Bank³.

Recently this May, Emmanuel Macron stated during a visit to Kigali that France had decided to take its development aid in Rwanda to unprecedented levels. Following this, the French Statesman announced an additional 370 million euros to finance various development projects in Rwanda. The amount will be managed by the French Development Agency⁴.

The USAID Administrator’s critical comments followed US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s speech in Nigeria last Friday, in which he highlighted democracy as one of five areas of common interest between the United States and Africa. Antony Blinken’s visit to African countries comes before the “Democracy Summit” called by the US President for December, which aims to combat “democratic backsliding” around the world.

The US Secretary of State did not mention Rwanda during his speech, but said that across Africa there are “leaders who



Samantha-Powers



Paul Kagame with a Member (Louis Michel) of the European Parliament, June 2019

are ignoring term limits, defrauding or postponing elections, exploiting social grievances to gain and stay in power, arresting opposition figures, repressing the media, and allowing security services to enforce pandemic (COVID-19) restrictions with brutality”⁵.

Paul Kagame won a third term in 2017 with nearly 99% of the vote, after changing the previous presidential term limit. Several international organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, have denounced the wave of repression of freedom of expression in Rwanda, as well as the arbitrary arrests, mistreatment and torture against opponents of the Kigali regime. The persecution of opponents crosses Rwanda’s borders and is felt in

some African states that host Rwandan refugees.

For example, the Rwandan community in Mozambique denounced in September the existence of a list of 20 Rwandan refugees identified as targets to be “slaughtered” by Kagame’s regime⁶. The denunciation was made days after the shooting murder of Revocant Karemangingo, vice-president of the Association of Rwandan Refugees in Mozambique (ARRM), which occurred in Matola. Karemangingo’s killers have not been identified by the authorities and the case will never be clarified, as it happened with other murders and forced disappearances of Rwandan refugees in Mozambique.

² <https://www.devex.com/news/samantha-power-says-rwanda-lacks-environment-that-allows-criticism-102147>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2594?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=532cee9246-EMAIL_CAM-PAIGN_2021_11_22_04_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-532cee9246-189118565

⁴ <https://cddmoz.org/franca-estara-a-usar-a-ajuda-ao-desenvolvimento-para-financiar-a-intervencao-das-tropas-ruandesas-em-mocambique-2/>

⁵ <https://www.devex.com/news/samantha-power-says-rwanda-lacks-environment-that-allows-criticism-102147>

⁶ <https://cddmoz.org/refugiados-ruandeses-denunciam-lista-com-alvos-do-regime-de-kigali-e-pedem-intervencao-do-estado-mocambicano-2/>

European Parliament condemned human rights violations in Rwanda

In October, the European Parliament denounced the “illegal arrest” and condemnation of Rwandan politician Paul Rusesabagina and urged the European Union to step up its efforts to secure his release. Rusesabagina, a prominent critic of Paul Kagame, was sentenced by Rwanda’s High Court to 25 years in prison for allegedly supporting terrorism.

The victim has rejected the terrorism charges, and several human rights organizations as well as the U.S. State Department have expressed concern about the decision. Belgium’s Foreign Minister Sophie Wilmès openly criticized that “Rusesabagina did not get a fair and impartial trial”⁷.

The case has caught the attention of the international community not only because Rusesabagina is a Belgian citizen and U.S. resident, but also because he has received international praise for saving hundreds of lives during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. His actions inspired the film “Hotel Rwanda,” released in 2004.

In a non-binding resolution, the European Parliament strongly condemned the Rwandan justice’s decision, describing it as “exemplary of human rights violations” in Rwanda. It called for Rusesabagina’s immediate release on humanitarian grounds and urged the European Union Delegation to Rwanda,



Paul Rusesabagina arriving at the Court of Justice in Kigali on 2 October 2020

as well as the embassies of European Union countries, to “strongly convey the request” to the Rwandan authorities⁸.

Rusesabagina said he was kidnapped in August 2020 in the United Arab Emirates, having been forced to board an

egg connecting Dubai to Burundi, with a stopover in Kigali. Upon landing in the Rwandan capital, Rusesabagina was immediately arrested and charged with terrorism for his links to the National Liberation Front, his opposition party⁹.

⁷ https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-condemn-conviction-paul-rusesabagina-hotel-rwanda-kagame/?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=532cee9246-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_22_04_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-532cee9246-189118565

⁸ https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-condemn-conviction-paul-rusesabagina-hotel-rwanda-kagame/?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=532cee9246-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_22_04_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-532cee9246-189118565

⁹ https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-condemn-conviction-paul-rusesabagina-hotel-rwanda-kagame/?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=532cee9246-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_22_04_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-532cee9246-189118565



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