

Reverend Christine Coleman

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Dear Congressman Hultgren, Congressman McGovern and all the distinguished members of this commission:

My name is Christine Coleman. I am a wife, a mother and a pastor. I live in Denver, Colorado but I was born and raised in Rwanda. For the past several years, I have spoken, prayed with and counseled many pastors and members of the clergy from Rwanda who came seeking prayer, wisdom and comfort as persecution from the government kept increasing while they watched their basic human rights being stripped away. These men and women are great citizens of noble characters, citizens who love and care much about Rwanda.

I am writing this statement in great desperation, sounding the alarm, reaching out to you, asking and begging for the USA government and the international community to do all that is in their powers to stop the hell that is going on in Rwanda. Though this is a very small country, barely visible on the world map, one should ask the question, "why such intense warfare if this country was less important?" True, Rwanda is a very small yet significant country, in that it is the heart of Africa. What goes on in Rwanda flows easily to the rest of African countries.

As you will see, the Rwandan government is guilty of serious human rights violations. Interrogations, raids, arrests, kidnappings, murders have become standard practice. There is neither freedom of expression nor freedom of religion or belief. The people of Rwanda live in fear of publicly speaking out about the government's abuses. Even in their own homes, they are spied on. The government has taught children to spy on their parents and vice versa. A friend confided, "in this country, you do not know who can turn you in, even your own people do turn you in in order to show their loyalty to Kagame and RPF and they are rewarded for that."

Today, 24 years after the genocide, with a government fully operating, thousands of people are still being arrested unjustly, kidnapped and many are brutally murdered – killed like something that has no value! When they are killed or kidnapped, there is no investigation whatsoever conducted by the government. Jails in Rwanda are filled with innocent great citizens and there are thousands of young people who do not know a touch of a mother or have a male figure in their lives to look up to because their parent(s) have been taken away and imprisoned for years on false charges!

Today, 24 years after the genocide, democracy is dead in Rwanda, and people are more than ever before clipped by fear because anyone who dare question the government's atrocities is considered a traitor. Rwanda is the only country I know of where citizens are not allowed to think and choose for themselves. Often times, citizens are told what to wear, parents are now being told how many children they can have, farmers are told what to plant and when to harvest and who to sell to; public servants are told who to follow on twitter and anyone who does not follow is perceived as an enemy of the country.

In Rwanda, Christians are being told by the government how to practice their faith. Rampant human rights abuses are at an all-time high. People are suffocating, everyone is in jail because no one has the right to speak or think independently or follow their own free will.

My Background Information

On April 6, 1994, the day that the Rwanda genocide began I was at my sister Francoise's house in Kigali for Easter break. I was a freshman at Rwanda University. My sister was married and had a baby girl. Though I had initially planned to stay there for the entire break, I changed my mind because an opportunity presented for me to go to the countryside where my then deceased parents had a farm and where my grandparents lived. Some of my siblings were there as well. The sudden change in my plans was the plan of the Almighty God to preserve my life. The moment I left my sister's house, I would never see this beautiful family again! My brother Jean Damascene came to pick me up the afternoon of April 6, we drove to the farm where he picked up his son to bring him back to their residence in Kigali. That night, the plane carrying the president of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down and from then on, the genocide began. The roads to Kigali were shut down. No one was able to easily come into the city nor to get out. My sister lived near by the CND, the now Parliamentary Building in Kimihurura where at the time, the Kagame's Ruling party RPF soldiers stayed. After the shooting down of the plane, the RPF came out of the CND and rounded up all the citizens in that neighborhood. The RPF came and took everyone inside my sister's house to Remera stadium where they were brutally murdered. My sister had a maid and a cook, when RPF came, the cook hid in the outside bathroom and he survived to tell us who took them from the house and a friend who survived the killings in the stadium reported the brutal murder of my sister, her husband Vianney, their little baby girl and the maid. They were all killed by the Kagame's RPF.

My brother Jean Damascene was later imprisoned for 13 years for crimes he had not committed. 13 years later, he was acquitted but the government kept harassing him, seeking to seize his properties. He had to flee the country. Besides losing my sister and her family, my two brothers also were killed by the RPF after the Rwanda Genocide.

In spite all those hardships, I moved on with my life. By God's grace, I forgave everyone, stayed positive hoping my country will get better. I migrated to United States in 1997 where I pursued my dreams and my calling as a servant of God.

When I left the country, I remember that people were being kidnapped, arrested or killed over nothing deserving of death. RPF would use guns like one who uses a spanking spoon to discipline their children and they would not be afraid to use it to kill as to set a good example of immediate obedience. They inspired fear and threatened to kill, thus people succumbed to their orders without speaking up. The spirit of fear entered Rwanda, to this day, the whole Rwanda is crippled by the spirit of fear.

Religious Persecution

Religious persecution has been in Rwanda for a while, but everything is done carefully and secretly to not be exposed to foreigners and international community. There is no longer any true independent journalism in Rwanda. Any journalist whose views were opposed to Kagame's were either killed, jailed or exiled. The rest joined Kagame's propaganda. The so-called independent journalists have all to report according to Kagame's wishes. No journalist is allowed to report any special event without their story being read and approved by the government's board. Any special event to report that involves killings,

imprisonments or human rights issues, the government board must write, prepare the article and the role of the journalists is to just copy and paste. Journalists are to say or publish only what is approved by the government and what praises Kagame and his administration. Because there is barely any authentic independent journalism in Rwanda, so much goes on without being reported.

For the past 21+ years away from home, I watched from afar and saw that Rwandans were losing their freedom day-in and day-out! Today, I will focus on religious persecution since I am a pastor who spoke with many Rwandan pastors, ministers and Christians inside Rwanda.

Even when I left the country in 1997, government informants would be sent during our church services to report on any preacher who pointed out that it is wrong to kill, to imprison innocent people. Persecution has been there but nothing like what happened in 2018.

Rwanda Cracking Down on Churches

In early 2018, Rwanda banished Human Rights Watch from the country and outlawed meeting, praying or worshipping outside of government approved buildings. Then, Rwanda began to close many churches over a short period. During the Rwanda National Leadership Retreat on March 1, 2018, talking about churches that were closed in Kigali alone, President Kagame said, *“Seven hundred churches in Kigali? Are these boreholes that give people water? I don’t think we have as many boreholes. Do we even have as many factories? But 700 churches, which you even had to close? This has been a mess!”*

The photo below is from Rwanda Northern Province’s twitter account. It shows a meeting that took place between Rwanda officials and the clergy regarding church closures. The following is the translation from Kinyarwanda into English:

“One of the decisions made in this meeting is that participants agreed that praying and fellowshiping outside a church building such as (wilderness, deserted areas, caves, and worshiping by the water) is forever prohibited.”



Northern P. Rwanda @Rwanda... · 1d
Umwe mu myanzuro ifatiye muri iyi nama ni uko abayitabiriye bemeje ko gusengera ahantu hatari insengeru (ubutayu, ubuvumo, amazi n'ahandi) bigomba kuvaho burundu mu [@RwandaNorth](#).



Within 3 months, more than 8,000 churches were closed citing building and safety code violations. But at the same time, the government cracked down on groups caught worshipping outside. For example, in the Northern Province that is mountainous, with a history of people praying outdoors, Kagame declared this practice illegal.

Some churches were closed even when they met all the requirements. Such was the case of an American-owned Amazing Christian radio and church. The radio had its license revoked. Missionary Greg Schoof, the director of Amazing Grace Christin Radio said that both RMC (Rwanda Media Council) and RURA (Rwanda Utility Regulation Authority) did not respect Rwanda laws in closing his radio and church.

The picture below shows Christians being followed and hunted by Rwanda law enforcements.



Imprisonment and Kidnapping of Pastors

In the midst of cracking down on churches, Rwanda officials arrested six pastors for assembling without permission: Bishop Innocent Rugagi, Pastor Charles Rwandamura, Pastor Fred Nyamurangwa, Reverend Emmanuel Ntambara, Pastor James Dura, and Pastor Emmanuel Kalisa Shyaka . They were all accused of plotting to defy the government orders. Although the pastors have since been released, a senior church leader explained that the arrest served as a stern warning to others to not resist the move of closing churches.



DISAPPEARING CHRISTIANS: This past summer, *Evangelist Gloriose Mukanyirigira alias Mama Vanessa from Kigali went missing along with another 45 ministers.* They took her away, did not care what would happen to her children and family.

HER CRIME: Freedom of Speech. She is an evangelist, one who preached the unadulterated Word of God without fear. Many days after her arrest, she was released, and the government did not care how they destabilized her ministry and family, they just moved on like nothing out of ordinary had taken place.

In the last week of November 2018, a pastor whose name remains anonymous for safety reason was jailed alongside with his entire congregation. They were caught praying and fellowshiping in his home, the government closed their church early November and they would not give them a license. Permission to have a church are given almost exclusively to pastors who praise Kagame. A pastor who fled the country recently shared that when you preach the name of Jesus and praise him 3 times, you must make

sure you praise Kagame at least 5 times. That praising the name of Jesus more than Kagame is a big offense. Also, pastors are constantly being harassed and they do not give them traveling papers easily.

Beaten, Tortured and Terrorized

Following the closing of churches, many took it to the mountains and into the woods to pray and congregate. In time of persecution like these, people find comfort in God. It was reported that those who were caught praying outdoors paid a high price and even some of them were killed.

Kidnapped and Disappearing Christians

The picture below is of the refugees from Kiziba camp who were being terrorized by Rwanda law enforcement for daring to protest. *Under Rwanda laws, protesting is prohibited.*



Arbitrary Arrests and Detention

Arbitrary arrests and detention are a normal occurrence in Rwanda. Law enforcement show up at someone's house and they take people at their wish, when they take them, they are always lying to them that they will be back soon, so this way many people do not even take a change of clothes. I have a friend who was taken this way and I was with him and I testify that this is true. The government is always snatching people away, kidnapping them to unknown locations. The gun may be used on anyone who dares to question law enforcement authority.

It is also normal for people to simply disappear, for example a man goes to work, and they do not come back for a day or longer. When the family members go to the police to inquire or file a case, the police usually say that they do not know the whereabouts of those who disappeared. Sometimes, many days later, they release them without giving explanations to their family members. In almost all cases like these, only a few people are returned back home while the rest go missing for years. Such is the case of

Cassien Ntamuhanga, a Christian journalist who became famous for escaping the Rwanda prison. He was imprisoned and tortured by the Rwanda government for 4 years and in his words, he said, *“during that time of our arbitrary arrest, the press and some members of our respective families announced our missing but the police denied any implication. After a week, the police accepted publicly that I was within its custody and they presented me to the press but they didn’t show the whereabouts of my colleague Gerald Niyomugabo who was arrested at the same time. It has been 4 years and there has been no news about him or his whereabouts!”* Cassien further says, *“On October 04, 2016, the secret services kidnapped my three brothers that I considered as my own children, because I was their official guardian for many years. Those young men were aged between 22 and 27 when they went missing. We have not heard from them. Their names are Ngabo Fikiri Jimmy, Moses Ngabonziza and Joel Mutuyimana.”*

Dear members of this briefing and commission, by these examples I have provided above, you can see where Rwanda is headed. Even when a goat goes missing in Rwanda, the whole village goes after it and searches for it until it is found, however, no one dares to find thousands of human beings who go missing inside Rwanda. This has been going on since the Kagame’s RPF took power in 1994.

Christians Are Being Killed in Rwanda

Not too long ago, a pastor who had just fled Rwanda and made it safely to Nairobi said that there was a time a group of Christians who were imprisoned were told by the officer that they were released. They were told to go pray at the mountain top, a normal practice among Christians in Rwanda. After prayer, they began to come down the steep mountain only to find out it was a trap. Their captors began to let loose the rocks, as they were going down the mountains, they were killed by the rocks sent down on them by their captors. They would then use the tragedy to warn others not to go pray in the mountains lest they die like those poor Christians.



September 10, 2014: Evangelist – Prophetess Jane Uwimana was a powerful woman of God. One day she was invited to go preach in different places in Rwanda, and among them a military camp. It was said that during that time, she prophesied against the regime. After preaching, she did not make it home. The next day, the police called one of her family members to go look for her corpse saying that a truck had hit her while she was riding a motor-cycle. They showed the corpse but they did not neither the motorcycle nor the truck. They simply told the family to pick up their dead.

A few years before Jane’s death, there was a young man nicknamed Zacchaeus because he was short. He was from Cyangugu, Rwanda. He used to go in the streets of Kigali, prophesying and calling out the government exposing their evil deeds. He was later jailed in a military camp and he finally disappeared. To this day, no one knows his whereabouts.

Father Evariste Nambaje, 47, a catholic priest who was the then Cyangugu Diocese accountant was found strangled in his jeep in 2014. His crime was that he confronted the delegates of the government with the truth and refused to lie and compromise.

Not only Christians, but Rwanda citizens as a whole, who criticize the government are killed. They are killed by guns, by weapons of all sorts; they are killed by staged accidents; they are poisoned and they are being killed in other unimaginable ways. Not only inside Rwanda but abroad as well. Please save them!

Government Meddling in Church Affairs

The government of Rwanda now controls the church. It is the government that tells pastors what to do and how to run the church. It is the government that now interprets the Bible. Currently, Rwanda has adopted laws that restricts fasting and one of the latest requirements is that pastors must now have a degree in theological education from an accredited school. This is a form of harassment and restriction on freedom of worship. The law also requires churches to explain their sources of funding, while donations received must be kept in a known bank account. Recently, lawmakers were even debating, imposing limits on how much churchgoers could tithe to their church. It is true that there are churches remaining in Rwanda but it is only those churches that are in covenant with Kagame and his administration. Anyone they suspect is not in agreement with them, whether it is true or not, they go after them.

The situation is intensifying. We, Rwandans who stand for democracy and freedom of all people, we would like to ask the members of the U.S. Congress to consider sanctions or an embargo on the Rwanda government and that USA, the home of the free will not allow Kagame to set foot on their soil. This so-called president has stripped his fellow citizens of their basic human rights—rights the U.S. believes and promotes has been given to every human being by God.

What I shared here is a drop in the ocean, there is so much more... But this has been shared so that you may have an inkling of an idea of the reality of the horror of the serious human rights violations in Rwanda. Rwanda is a whitewashed tomb and the notion of freedom in Rwanda is a farce.

Thank you very much. My prayers are with you.

May God bless you! May God bless the USA!

Respectfully,

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