

STATEMENT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN RWANDA
Delivered at the 87th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

ARTICLE 19, Global Campaign for Free Expression: NGO 66

May 2026

Honourable Chairperson, Honourable Commissioners, State Delegates, and distinguished participants,

This statement is delivered by [ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa](#), an organisation working to advance freedom of expression and access to information across Africa and globally, pursuant to Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

We recognise Rwanda's continued investment in digital transformation, public service delivery, and ICT infrastructure development. We further acknowledge efforts undertaken to strengthen data protection frameworks and expand digital access across the country. Rwanda has consistently positioned itself as a regional leader in innovation and technological development.

However, despite these developments, ARTICLE 19 remains concerned about the continued deterioration of civic space and restrictions affecting freedom of expression, media independence, access to information, and digital rights in Rwanda.

Honourable Commissioners,

The rights guaranteed under Article 9 of the African Charter, as elaborated under the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, require States ***not only to refrain from interfering with expression, but also to actively create an enabling environment for independent media, public participation, and access to diverse sources of information.***

In Rwanda, several legal and practical barriers continue to undermine these protections.

- Vague and overly broad offences relating to false information, rumours, harmful propaganda, and threats to public order continue to be used in ways that risk criminalising legitimate expression and dissent. Criminal defamation provisions also remain inconsistent with evolving regional and international standards on freedom of expression.
- We are further concerned that the current legal and regulatory framework has not adequately evolved to recognise the realities of the digital information ecosystem, including the role played by bloggers, online commentators, YouTube-based journalists, and independent digital content creators.

Honourable Commissioners,

Independent journalists and online commentators in Rwanda continue to operate within a climate of fear, intimidation, and self-censorship. Reports of arrests, harassment, threats, and reprisals targeting journalists and critics continue to emerge, particularly against individuals perceived to be critical of state policies or governance practices.

- We are particularly concerned about the continued restrictions affecting independent and diaspora-based media platforms, including blocked online news websites and limited access to alternative sources of information.

These developments undermine media pluralism and restrict the ability of citizens to freely seek, receive, and impart information as protected under Article 9 of the African Charter.

- We further note concerns regarding *the institutional independence of media regulatory bodies and the broader operating environment for civil society* organisations working on governance, human rights, and accountability issues.

Honourable Commissioners,

Access to information remains an essential pillar of democratic governance, public accountability, and citizen participation. While Rwanda adopted an Access to Information Law, implementation challenges persist.

- Public institutions continue to inconsistently respond to information requests, proactive disclosure obligations remain uneven, and awareness of access to information rights remains limited among the public.
- Importantly, the absence of an independent oversight mechanism to monitor implementation and adjudicate complaints significantly weakens enforcement of the right to information.

In the digital age, restrictions on civic space, media freedom, and access to information have far-reaching consequences not only for democratic participation, but also for development, public trust, and the integrity of information ecosystems.

Honourable Chairperson,

ARTICLE 19 therefore respectfully urges the African Commission and the Government of Rwanda to:

1. First, repeal or amend vague speech-related offences that enable arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression, including provisions relating to false information and harmful propaganda.
2. Decriminalise defamation in line with the African Commission's Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa.
3. Ensure the protection, safety, and independence of journalists, bloggers, online commentators, and human rights defenders, including through prompt, transparent, and independent investigations into all reported cases of harassment, intimidation, or attacks.

4. Strengthen guarantees for media pluralism and ensure that regulatory bodies operate independently and free from political interference.
5. Establish an independent oversight mechanism for the implementation of the Access to Information Law, with powers to adjudicate complaints and ensure compliance by public institutions.
6. Finally, ensure that measures aimed at regulating digital spaces and online information ecosystems remain fully compliant with the African Charter and do not disproportionately restrict civic participation or legitimate expression.

Honourable Commissioners,

As Africa continues to navigate the opportunities and challenges of digital governance, it remains essential that states uphold their obligations under the African Charter and ensure that technological advancement does not come at the expense of fundamental rights and freedoms.

I thank you.