

# ***ISHEMA Party- Parti ISHEMA- Ishyaka ISHEMA***



***VERITE – INTREPIDITE – JUSTICE SOCIALE***

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## **Speech at the Washington Launch of the National Council for Democracy in Rwanda (NCDR)**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Members of the Press,

Representatives of Governments, Civil Society, and the International Community,

We thank you for attending this important press conference organized to discuss the current political situation in Rwanda and the urgent need for democratic reforms. My name is Nadine Claire KASINGE, serving as the president of ISHEMA political Party.

For many years, Rwanda has been presented internationally as a model of stability and development. However, behind this image lies a political system where democratic freedoms remain severely restricted and where citizens who express dissent continue to face intimidation, imprisonment, disappearance, and even death. A political system that operates as such cannot be a model, it must be treated as it is: the evil not only to avoid, but also to uproot.

### **A Closed Political Space**

1. The political space in Rwanda remains tightly controlled by the ruling RPF-Inkotanyi. Since 2009, no genuinely independent political organization has been freely allowed to register since intimidation, obstruction, and political persecution make the everyday routine. Political pluralism exists largely in appearance, while in practice opposition voices are systematically silenced. Any attempt to organize politically outside structures tolerated by the ruling party is often treated as a threat to state security.
2. ISHEMA Political Party itself experienced this exclusion directly. In both 2016 and 2017, our party was prevented from registering and participating in elections despite repeated efforts to comply with legal requirements. These actions demonstrated clearly that the political system in Rwanda does not permit genuine democratic competition. This reality

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has deprived Rwandans of their fundamental democratic right to choose their leaders freely and to participate openly in the governance of their country.

### **Persecution of Opposition Figures**

3. Rwanda's recent political history has been marked by repeated persecution of opposition leaders and critics of the government:
  - **Victoire Ingabire Umehoza** was imprisoned after attempting to participate in presidential elections. She was rearrested last year and is now in unending provisional detention waiting on a politically motivated trial.
  - **Déo Mushayidi and Bernard Ntaganda** were also arrested and imprisoned for exercising their political rights and expressing dissenting views.
  - **Theoneste Niyitegeka** and many other political activists have faced repeated harassment and persecution because of their opposition activities.
  - We also remember the tragic killing of **André Kagwa Rwisereka**, vice president of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda, whose death sent shockwaves throughout the opposition community.
  - Equally troubling remains the unresolved disappearance of **Boniface Twagirimana**, deputy leader of FDU-Inkingi, who disappeared while in detention under highly suspicious circumstances. To this day, his family and the Rwandan people have not received credible answers regarding his fate.

### **Repression of Journalists, Commentators, and YouTubers**

Freedom of expression in Rwanda continues to deteriorate. Independent journalists, online commentators, and YouTubers who criticize government policies are regularly arrested, threatened, prosecuted, or forced into silence.

Individuals such as Yvonne Idamange became symbols of this repression after publicly criticizing the government and subsequently being imprisoned.

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- **Niyonsenga Dieudonné**, also known as Cyuma Hassan, was arrested and imprisoned after reporting on issues affecting ordinary citizens.
- **Théoneste Nsengimana** of Umubavu TV is also currently imprisoned under what many observers regard as politically motivated and fabricated accusations intended to silence independent journalism.
- **Karasira Aimable** also faced prosecution and imprisonment after expressing dissenting opinions online. His recent death immediately after completing a five-year prison sentence has raised serious concerns and renewed fears among many Rwandans regarding the treatment of government critics.
- We also remember journalist **John Williams Ntwali**, whose death occurred under circumstances that continue to raise serious questions among journalists, human rights defenders, and members of civil society.

The climate of fear created by these actions undermines free speech and discourages citizens from participating openly in national debate.

### **ISHEMA Party Has Not Been Spared**

ISHEMA Political Party itself has not been spared from repression.

**Dr. Joseph Nkusi**, one of the founding members of our party, was repatriated from Norway and arrested upon arrival in Kigali. He is currently serving a ten-year prison sentence.

Another member, **Aphrodis Matuje**, disappeared after years of detention in undisclosed locations. His whereabouts and condition remain unknown, causing anguish to his family, friends, and colleagues.

These cases demonstrate that repression in Rwanda is not selective but systematic against all independent political voices.

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## **The National Council for Democracy in Rwanda**

As part of the search for a peaceful and inclusive solution to Rwanda's political crisis, we are about to announce the launch in Washington, D.C. of the National Council for Democracy in Rwanda.

This initiative is intended to bring together opposition organizations, civil society actors, intellectuals, members of the diaspora, religious leaders, youth, women, and all democratic forces committed to peaceful political transformation in Rwanda.

The National Council for Democracy in Rwanda seeks to create a common platform for dialogue, coordination, reconciliation, and preparation for an inclusive democratic transition.

Rwanda's future cannot be built through exclusion, fear, or repression. It must be built through participation, mutual respect, and recognition of the rights of all citizens.

We believe that sustainable peace and stability will only be achieved when all Rwandans are allowed to participate freely in shaping the future of their country.

## **Our Vision for Democratic Change**

ISHEMA Political Party believes that Rwanda can move toward peaceful democratic transformation without violence or instability.

During the COVID-19 period, our party presented proposals aimed at establishing national reconciliation, democratic openness, respect for human rights, and inclusive governance. Those proposals remain relevant today.

We continue to advocate for:

- **The opening of political space to all peaceful political organizations;**
- **The release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience;**
- **Independent investigations into disappearances, suspicious deaths, and allegations of abuses;**

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- **Judicial independence and rule of law;**
- **Freedom of expression, media freedom, and protection of civil society;**
- **National dialogue involving all components of Rwandan society;**
- **Free and fair elections supervised by credible independent institutions.**

## **Message to Rwanda's International Partners**

We wish to assure Rwanda's economic, financial, and military partners that democratic political change in Rwanda does not threaten legitimate international interests.

On the contrary, long-term stability and sustainable cooperation can only flourish under a government that respects the rights and dignity of its citizens.

A governance system grounded in accountability, justice, and democratic participation is the best guarantee for safeguarding foreign investments, regional security cooperation, and economic partnerships.

We also wish to emphasize an important principle to the international community: President Paul Kagame should not be confused with the nation of Rwanda itself.

Governments and leaders come and go, but the people of Rwanda remain. The international community has long-term interests in living and cooperating in harmony with the Rwandan people, not with any single individual or ruling group.

A democratic transition in Rwanda should therefore not be viewed as a threat to international partnerships, regional stability, or economic cooperation. On the contrary, a political system based on freedom, accountability, and inclusion would strengthen Rwanda's institutions and create a more stable and trustworthy environment for all partners.

However, when the international community remains silent while the Rwandan people face repression, many citizens increasingly perceive foreign partners as accomplices of authoritarian rule. This perception risks damaging the trust and goodwill necessary for future cooperation.

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We therefore call upon democratic nations, human rights organizations, and international institutions to stand with the people of Rwanda in their legitimate aspirations for freedom, justice, and democratic governance.

### **Conclusion**

The people of Rwanda deserve a nation where no citizen is imprisoned for their opinions, where political competition is not criminalized, and where every individual can speak, organize, and participate freely in public life.

ISHEMA Political Party remains committed to peaceful democratic change, national reconciliation, and the building of a Rwanda governed by law rather than fear.

We believe that a free and democratic Rwanda is possible, and we believe that peaceful change remains the best path forward for our nation.

We thank you for your attention.

Done in Washington, D.C.

On behalf of ISHEMA Political Party

Mrs Nadine Claire KASINGE

President



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