

# Press release – Human rights breaches in Uganda, Rwanda and Kazakhstan



## **The political situation in Uganda**

Parliament deplores that the 14 January general elections in Uganda were neither democratic nor transparent. MEPs also condemn the excessive use of force by the police and armed forces during the election and their growing interference in political affairs.

The resolution condemns the violence, continued harassment and systematic crackdown faced by political opposition leaders in Uganda, as well as the suppression of civil society. All those arrested and detained for participating in peaceful political assemblies or for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association must be released immediately and unconditionally and have their charges dropped, says the text.

Finally, Parliament reiterates that sanctions against individuals and organisations responsible for human rights violations in Uganda must be adopted under the new EU human rights sanction mechanism, the so-called EU Magnitsky Act.

The text was approved by 632 votes in favour, 15 against and 48 abstentions. See the full resolution [here](#). (11.02.2021)

## **Rwanda: the case of Paul Rusesabagina**

MEPs condemn the enforced disappearance, illegal rendition and incommunicado detention of Rwandan human rights defender, government critic and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Paul Rusesabagina, whose story was recounted in the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda*.

Mr Rusesabagina, who is a Belgian citizen and a US resident, was forcibly

transferred from Dubai to Kigali under unclear circumstances on 27 August last year. He only reappeared on 31 August at the headquarters of the Rwandan Investigation Bureau. He was initially charged with 13 offences, including financing terrorism, armed robbery and attempted murder. Some charges were later dropped, with those that remained relating to events that took place in the country's Nyaruguru and Nyamagabe regions in 2018.

Parliament calls for an international investigation into this matter and expresses its deep concern about the violation of Mr Rusesabagina's rights. MEPs urge the Rwandan authorities to allow him to undergo a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal applying international human rights standards, and grant him legal counsel of his choosing.

Given Mr Rusesabagina's medical condition, MEPs call on the Rwandan Government to guarantee, under all circumstances, his physical and psychological well-being and access to proper medication.

The text was approved by 659 votes in favour, 1 against and 35 abstentions. It will be available in full [here](#). (11.02.2021)

### **The human rights situation in Kazakhstan**

Parliament urges Kazakhstan's Government to act in accordance with its international obligations and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in its Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU.

MEPs note that Kazakhstan's parliamentary elections on 10 January this year were described by the European External Action Service as a "missed opportunity" to demonstrate that political reforms have been implemented since the last elections. They also call on the Kazakh government to drop politically-motivated charges and end all forms of arbitrary detention, reprisals and harassment of human rights activists, religious organisations, civil society organisations, trade unions, journalists and political opposition movements.

People must be able to express their political, religious and other views freely, the text says, with Parliament calling on the Kazakh Government to amend the new law on peaceful assembly in order to guarantee this freedom. MEPs also urge the country's authorities to immediately release and fully rehabilitate all political prisoners.

The text was approved by 598 votes in favour, 43 against and 52 abstentions. For additional information on the content, it will be available in full [here](#). (11.02.2021)

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# Press release – Still many challenges ahead to achieve gender equality



More than twenty-five years after the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BPfA) was adopted, MEPs regret that, although some progress have been made, no EU member states have fully attained the targets set in the text, as the [5th review of the BPfA](#) published by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2020 shows.

In the resolution adopted by 505 votes in favour, 109 against and 76 abstentions, MEPs also express deep concern regarding the current pandemic, which exacerbates existing gender inequalities, threatens to reverse the progress made until now, and could push [47 million more women and girls](#) below the poverty line worldwide.

## **Eradicating gender-based violence**

In order to tackle violence against women, MEPs reiterate their call to ratify the [Istanbul Convention](#) and urge the Commission to come up with an EU Directive to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence. The increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic must be urgently addressed, they add, by providing protection services for victims, such as helplines, safe accommodation and health services.

Specific measures are also needed to eradicate cyber violence, including online harassment, cyberbullying and hate speech, which disproportionately affect women and girls.

## **Towards a more balanced gender representation in the economy**

Parliament reiterates its call on EU member states to unblock the [Women on Boards Directive](#), and pushes for EU targets, action plans, timelines and temporary special measures to move towards a balanced representation in all executive, legislative and administrative positions.

Adopting EU legislation to increase pay transparency would help to close the gender gap, MEPs stress, who regret that the Commission proposal on that issue has not yet been presented as planned.

## **Universal access to healthcare is a human right**

MEPs are particularly worried by some retrogressive tendencies regarding access to health services in some EU countries. They notably [condemn the recent de facto ban on abortion](#) in Poland.

Access to family planning, maternal health services and safe and legal abortion services are key elements that guarantee women's rights and save lives, they underline. Finally, MEPs also call for the universal respect for, and access to, sexual and reproductive health and rights services, as agreed in the Beijing Declaration.

## **Background**

The Beijing Declaration was adopted by the UN at the end of the 4th World Conference on Women on 15 September 1995 to promulgate a set of principles on gender equality. The Platform for Action called for strategic actions in a variety of areas (economy, education, health, violence, decision-making, etc.).

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## **[Conference on legal aid for children in criminal proceedings](#)**

FRA attended the EU-funded LA-Child project's online conference 'Legal aid for children in criminal proceedings'. The project aims to strengthen the procedural rights of children in conflict with laws enshrined in the EU's Procedural Safeguards Directive.

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## Media advisory – Press briefing ahead of the informal video conference of economic and finance ministers of 16 February 2021



The press briefing ahead of the informal video conference of economic and finance ministers will take place on **Monday, 15 February 2021 at 11.00**. This briefing will be “off the record”.

Please note that this press briefing will take place remotely.

In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using [this link](#).

Those who already registered for previous press briefings or press conferences of informal video conferences of economic and finance ministers do not need to do it again.

- **Deadline for registration: 15 February at 10:00**

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants shortly after the deadline.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

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## Article – Stopping human trafficking: MEPs call for more action



Often seen as a modern form of slavery, human trafficking is one of the fastest growing crimes, with new technologies, migration flows and the Covid-19 crisis creating new risks and challenges across the EU.

## Human trafficking in the EU

EU countries reported 14,145 victims of human trafficking between 2017 and 2018, of which 72% were women and girls, [according to a European Commission report](#). Children accounted for nearly a quarter (22%) of all registered victims. However, the actual number of victims could be far higher due to the lack of consistent and comparable data.

More than half (60%) of registered victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation; 15% for other types of forced labour and 15% for other reasons, such as begging, organ removal or domestic servitude. Nearly half (49%) are from an EU country.

Almost three quarters of the traffickers registered were male, with the majority of them EU citizens.