

PRESS RELEASE

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RWANDA: Political Space Is Needed Now.

The Permanent Consultative Council of Opposition Parties in Rwanda which brings together: The United Democratic Forces–Inkingi, The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda, Le Parti Social IMBERAKURI, is strongly disturbed with the warning Letter issued by the Minister of Local Government, Mr. James MUSONI, yesterday, 25th February 2010 to politicians and politicians to be in Rwanda.

The Hon. Minister is flogging a dead horse, what he is saying is common knowledge. We are law abiding citizens and are committed to respecting the Laws in place and the Constitution.

However, the letter seems to limit the little political space that has started to be visible in Rwanda.

This seems to be an attempt aimed at muzzling the democratic right of freedom of expression under the pretext of using the law. The Minister is stretching the interpretation of the constitution to its widest limits. This is intended to intimidate people into silence and to muzzle the freedom of speech.

If the RPF Government is bent on silencing the opposition, it should not use the constitution. This is abuse of process. It's in RPF's advantage to open up political space.

The Minister is quite right in reminding us. But what has prompted such a reminder? Hope we shall be getting reminders every month as election fever heats up.

This alarm raises serious concerns about the shadows, interpretations and limits of the current law on political parties.

In this context, the absence of dialogue between the government and the opposition parties is harmful to the country's governance. Local political actors and international partners of Rwanda urgently need to assess these risks and create a national political dialogue. Otherwise the political space will remain ultimately hermetically sealed off.

The Ministry of Local Government is playing a key role in the democratisation process especially in handling the authorization of political meetings; registering political parties and following up the eventual violations of laws.

Authorisations for political parties to hold their founding congresses are denied with no reason; political leaders are attacked and beaten in government offices; political parties

are harassed by the police and security services. Those are obvious signs of a political deadlock.

The United Democratic Forces constitutional congress has been postponed because the local authority failed to respond to the application submitted.

The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda was forbidden to hold its congress by the local administration on unclear grounds of security.

The future of the Parti Social IMBERAKULI is at stake as well because of dissolution threats.

We call upon the Government of Rwanda to prove its willingness to open up political space and let multiparty politics flourish as a matter of urgency. A political dialogue with the opposition and other stakeholders is urgently needed.

We would also like to inform the Rwandan public that the three parties by forming a common platform (Permanent Consultative Council of Opposition Parties) did not break any law, since they did not form a coalition or a political party's forum. This is a political right as stipulated in the constitution; we just used our freedom of association.

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