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### Rwanda: RPF Seeks to Eliminate Opposition Elections Set to Solidify Power

(New York, May 8, 2003) — The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) is working to eliminate any opposition to its victory in elections scheduled before the end of 2003, Human Rights Watch said in a new briefing paper published today.

The briefing paper, "Preparing for Elections: Tightening Control in the Name of Unity" examines the Rwandan government's effort to eliminate the Democratic Republican Movement (MDR), the second largest party in the country after the RPF. Last year, the government banned the new Party for Democracy and Renewal-Ubuyanja (PDR-Ubuyanja) and prohibited formation of any others.

"With the formation of new parties impossible and the one significant old party dissolved, the RPF will have assured the electoral victory it so badly wants," said Alison Des Forges, Senior Adviser to the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch.

The paper quotes a recent speech by Rwandan President Paul Kagame, in which he says the outcome of the elections is already known. Kagame also threatens to "wound" dissidents who oppose the government.

The Transitional National Assembly recommended dissolving the MDR alleging the party was "drugged" by a "divisionist" and genocidal ideology. Remarkably, one of the accused MDR assembly members is well-known for saving Tutsi during the genocide.

In the briefing paper, Human Rights Watch analyzes the assembly's report and some 900 pages of documentation said to support its conclusions. Much of the information relates to the history of the MDR, including to a faction, which participated in the 1994 genocide, but which no longer exists. For the current period, the report accuses forty-six persons of being at meetings where "divisionist" ideas were discussed. Officials insist that police and intelligence services have solid proof of meetings and other "divisionist" activities, but the materials thus far published fail to establish these charges.

The MDR has been allied with the RPF since 1992 and has participated in the RPF-led government since 1994.

"It's remarkable that Rwandan authorities now find a long-standing ally so terrible that it must be suppressed," said Des Forges.

Five persons, including a high-ranking former military officer, a deputy in the assembly and a judge, have all "disappeared" in the last month. Authorities say they have no knowledge of their whereabouts. Another military officer has been arrested and three others have fled the country, one a general and former minister of defense, another a colonel who was also a member of parliament. These persons are accused of "divisionism" in the commission report or are thought to be associated with such persons. The founders of PDR-Ubuyanja—and those accused of being supporters—have been in jail without trial, some of them for more than a year.

"It appears that the 'wounding' of supposed dissidents has begun," said Des Forges. "The electoral victory will likely follow soon after."

The briefing paper can be found online at <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/rwanda0503bck.htm>.