

Trafficking In Desperate Black Africans: Israel, Rwanda, and Libya

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On November 14 CNN shocked the world with its [video news report](#) of Black African migrants being sold into slavery in Libya. Eight days later the Rwandan government issued a press release headlined “[Rwanda’s door is open for migrants held captive in Libya](#).” The day after that, the [New York Times reported that Rwanda](#) would welcome their “African brothers and sisters still held in captivity” and quoted African Union Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat praising Rwanda’s offer “to resettle up to 30,000 African migrants languishing in Libya.”

The same story was reported across the Internet and in daily newspapers in the metropolitan US, Europe, and Africa. Rwandan President Paul Kagame is grandstanding as Papa Africa on the world stage, but nothing could be further from the truth or more preposterous than his proposal. Here are four reasons why:

Rwanda is a brutal totalitarian surveillance state

President Kagame and his ruling party run a brutal, totalitarian, US-backed regime with the ninth highest per capita incarceration rate in the world. Many Rwandan prisoners are convicted of speech crime—daring to disagree with the government’s legally enforced description of Rwanda’s 1994 massacres as “genocide against the Tutsi.” Victoire Ingabire, who attempted to run for president against Kagame in 2010, is instead serving 15 years for saying that “before, during, and after the genocide, other Rwandan people were killed. Hutus and Tutsis were killed.”

The African Court of Human and People’s Rights recently ruled that Ingabire’s free speech rights were denied and that she did not receive a fair trial, but Rwanda hasn’t even acknowledged the ruling much less released her.

In “[Bad News: Last Journalist in a Dictatorship](#),” Anjan Sundaram describes extreme poverty among Rwanda’s rural majority and a surveillance state so pervasive that Rwandans fear to trust their own family and neighbors. Does this sound like a government ready to open its arms to its “African brothers and sisters”?

Rwanda is already densely populated and “food insecure”

Rwanda is the second most densely populated nation in Africa and the second poorest in East Africa. Land is scarce. In July 2016, a headline in The East African read “[Famine hits over 100,000 Rwandan families in Eastern province](#).” The report said that rural Rwandans

were fleeing famine across the Ugandan border. Howard Buffett, multibillionaire, agribusinessman, and friend of President Kagame, has displaced many of them to grow export crops on land they need to grow food.

President Kagame is a war criminal

President Kagame is a war criminal with the blood of millions of his “African brothers and sisters” in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on his hands.

In October 1990, he led Ugandan troops invading Rwanda. Many of them were the children of the Rwandan Tutsi minority who had fled the country during the 1960s after the Hutu majority came to power. After a four-year war and the assassination of the Rwandan and Burundian presidents, Kagame’s army overthrew the Rwandan government and established a de facto Tutsi dictatorship, which falsely claims to have ended competition between the Hutu and Tutsi. The last 100 days of the war included the massacres of half a million or more Rwandans that came to be known as the Rwandan Genocide. Most of the world has never heard of the invasion and four-year war, only the last 100 days depicted in the oversimplified, decontextualized story told in the movie “Hotel Rwanda.”

In 1996, and then again in 1998, Rwanda and Uganda invaded the vastly resource-rich Democratic Republic of the Congo, enabled by US weapons, logistics, and intelligence. They massacred hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees, expelled one president, assassinated another, massacred Congolese people and drove them from their homes to plunder their resources. Today, after the death of more than six million Congolese, parts of the country remain under de facto occupation by Rwanda. Rwandans have become officers in the Congolese army and many Congolese believe that the Congo’s President Joseph Kabila is himself a Rwandan Tutsi.

The “[2012 UN Group of Experts Report on the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)” reported that the Rwandan Minister of Defense, who answers to President Kagame, commanded the M23 militia then rampaging through Congo’s North Kivu Province bordering Rwanda. This week Human Rights Watch reported that Kabila had recruited former [M23 militia men from Rwanda](#) to suppress Congolese protests of his refusal to hold an election and relinquish power. Sixty-four protesters have been killed and many more injured.

African migrants have already been severely abused in Rwanda

The most immediate argument against sending 30,000 African migrants from Libya to Rwanda is that migrants deported from Israel to Rwanda in 2014 and 2015 have not found a home there and have instead been horrifically abused and trafficked back to the Mediterranean.

Upon their arrival in Rwanda, they are deprived of their papers, which means they cannot seek political asylum or legally cross borders no matter what happens to them. Then they’re trafficked through a smuggling network from Rwanda to Uganda, Uganda to South Sudan, South Sudan to Sudan, Sudan to Libya, and Libya to Italy or other European shores if they make it that far, but many don’t. Traffickers all along the smuggling route know that they arrive in Rwanda with \$3500 that the Israeli government paid them to leave, and each takes a cut for their leg of the smuggling route if they don’t take it all.

Journalists for the Israeli publication Haaretz have completed two investigative reports about

this with the help of the Fund for Investigative Journalism and The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, an NGO. Haaretz published the first, "[Asylum Seekers Who Left Israel for Rwanda Describe a Hopeless Journey](#)," in May 2015, and the second, "[Theft, Extortion and Death: The Agonizing Stories of Refugees Israel Deported to Africa](#)," in November 2017.

Haaretz journalists are also campaigning to stop Israel from deporting another 10,000 Eritrean and Sudanese migrants to Rwanda. Israel proposes to pay the Rwandan government \$5000 per migrant—for a total of \$50 million—for welcoming and settling them. Had Haaretz not investigated the fate of migrants deported earlier, the world might believe they're all alive and well in Rwanda.

Anyone who still imagines that Rwanda will welcome 30,000 African migrants from Libya with open arms should read the Haaretz reports.

Migrants who survived the entire treacherous route and reached safety in Europe saw many die or disappear along the way. They were beaten, robbed, raped, and barely fed by their smugglers. They tell their migrant friends still in Israel that they're better off going to prison—their other option as unwanted migrants in Israel— than going to Rwanda.

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Bénédicte Kumbi Ndjoko is a Congolese Swiss history teacher, writer, and PanAfricanist justice activist. In March 2013, she disrupted a UN conference in Geneva about the sham Congo peace agreement, and interrupted Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon till the gendarmes threw her out. Her intervention was captured on video: "[Free Congo: Face to Face with Ban Ki Moon, Geneva March 1, 2013](#)."

Ann Garrison and Bénédicte Kumbi Ndjoko are both recipients of the [Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza Democracy and Peace Prize](#).

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