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### MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

## Presidential Term Limits and Stability in the Great Lakes Region

*By Nicole N’Gambwa*

There is a consensus among African analysts that one of the continent’s greatest problems is lack of good governance. This article will make the case for presidential terms limits as a path forward to much needed political stability to spur economic development and lasting peace.

Year after year, leaders in Africa promise to bring about change in their countries. They often come in as visionaries, revolutionaries who fill their people with hope that this time things might actually be different—but it never is. This pattern is seen all over Africa in leaders’ abandonment of the principles that carried them to power, in their oppression of citizens’ rights and opposition parties, and most importantly, their refusal to give up power.

The Great Lakes Region of Africa is a prime example of why presidential term limits are absolutely necessary if countries in the region want to take a big step towards stability. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda all have very similar stories in terms of leadership. As their terms as president approach their constitutional ends, Kabila, Kagame and Nkurunziza are all being watched by the international community to see whether the transfer of power will be peaceful and democratic—or whether it will repeat the past cycles of violence and bending the law.

### Rise to Power

Three out of the four leaders of the countries which comprise the Great Lakes Region rose to power as rebel leaders.

COUNTRY	PRESIDENT	YEARS IN OFFICE	CONSTITUTIONAL TERM LIMIT
DR Congo	Joseph Kabila	13	Two 5-year terms
Rwanda	Paul Kagame	14	Two 7-year terms
Burundi	Pierre Nkurunziza	9	Two 5-year terms
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	28	No term limits

Joseph Kabila of the DRC is the only one who took a different route to power. Ten days after the assassination of his father, then-president Laurent Kabila, Kabila was sworn into office as president in January 2001. However, his first official term did not start until he was officially elected in 2006.



Paul Kagame of Rwanda fled to Uganda as a child in the midst of anti-Tutsi killings in Rwanda. He became Rwanda's vice-president in 1994 after leading the Tutsi rebel group RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) and ending the Rwandan genocide. As vice-president he was widely considered to be the country's real leader. In 2003 he was officially elected president.

Meanwhile in Uganda, Yoweri Museveni was in exile in Tanzania when he began waging guerilla warfare against Dictator Idi Amin's brutal regime. He overthrew the government in 1986 and declared himself president shortly after. One of his first statements made after overthrowing the regime was "the main problem in Africa is leaders who do not want to leave power." Under his government, presidential term limits in Uganda were abolished in 2005—consequently making him Uganda's biggest problem.

Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi joined the armed wing of Hutu rebel group CNDD-FDD (*Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*) in 1995 after civil war broke out between Hutu rebel groups and the country's Tutsi dominated army. By signing a peace agreement with then-president Domitien Ndayizeye, he was granted immunity from prosecution for war crimes and became a part of Ndayizeye's cabinet as minister of good governance. In 2005, he was elected president. So far he is the only Burundian president to have served a full term uninterrupted.



As someone who served as minister of good governance, one would expect him to uphold Burundi's constitutional law and leave office after his mandated term—however, he, along with his three aforementioned colleagues, look like they may hold onto power by any means necessary, even if it means changing the constitution.

### Perpetuating the Cycle: The Case of Rwanda

The countries in the Great Lakes Region are all very politically intertwined and unstable. These governments have all been accused of human rights' violations and Rwanda is very good example. Rwanda has seen exponential growth economically and developmentally. It literally rose from the ashes after the genocide in 1994 to become one of east Africa's most flourishing countries. National reconciliation has been one of the focuses of Kagame's government, but there is a lot of evidence pointing to the fact that [the Hutu-Tutsi divide in Rwanda remains as strong as before if not worse](#). President Kagame and his supporters say that his country has advanced in many ways, but at what cost? His government is accused of human rights violations and coming down very hard on journalists and opposition parties. There have been several cases of assassination of opposition leaders inside and outside Rwanda. Colonel Patrick Karegeya, former Rwandan chief of external intelligence under Kagame's regime, was murdered in exile in South Africa on New Year's 2014. He fled to South Africa after "falling out" with the Kagame administration in



2008 and forming an opposition party in South Africa called the Rwandan National Congress (RNC).

In 2012 he said that he expected he would be killed because he had knowledge of the regime's "dark secrets." Following Karegeya's death, members of the RNC issued [the following statement accusing the Kagame regime of being despotic](#): "By killing its opponents, the criminal regime in Kigali seeks to intimidate and silence the Rwandan people into submission."

Former members of Kagame's administration have described him as very violent and are sure that attempts on their lives were ordered directly by him. Former chief of staff of the Rwandan armed forces, General Kayumba Nyamwasa, has survived three assassination attempts. He is now living under state protection in South Africa. He is sure that the attempts on his life came from Kagame's orders. Kagame himself, although denying involvement in the murder of Karegeya or the attempted murder of Nyamwasa, was quoted as saying "[You can't betray Rwanda and not get punished for it...](#) even those still alive, will reap the consequences. Anyone. It is a matter of time." Are these not the words of a tyrant? A free and fair political atmosphere implies the existence of opposition. Are these the kind of men we want to hold on to power?

### **Upcoming Elections and Talk of Constitutional Amendments**

These men have been in power for long enough and it is time for them to hand over the reins to someone new. Elections are scheduled for 2015 in Burundi, 2016 in the DRC and Uganda, and 2017 in Rwanda. All four presidents have hinted that they may attempt to run for president even after their terms have expired.

U.S. Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, Russ Feingold, the U.S Secretary of State John Kerry, and the Catholic Church in the DRC have [urged Kabila not to touch the constitution and to leave power](#) after his term is up.

Nkurunziza's ruling party wants him to seek another term despite his two-term limit coming to an end next year, and he has hinted that he is on board with the idea.

Kagame, when asked if he was planning to give up power in 2017, he said that "I have been asked when or whether I am going to leave office right from the time when I started. It is as if I am here just to leave. I'm here to do business on behalf of Rwandans. I don't know what else I can give you on that, but let's wait and see what happens as we go. [Whatever will happen, we'll have an explanation.](#)"

And sadly, Museveni's case is no different. The same man who came to power claiming that Africa's main

problem was power-hungry leaders is the same man who abolished presidential term limits and seems to have no intention of relinquishing power. After 28 years in power, Uganda still faces many of the same problems that it did when Museveni came to power in 1986. If he has not been able to fix the issues facing his country in almost 30 years, what more does he have to offer the country? His political party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), has urged him to run again.

If the countries in the Great Lakes Region want to see sustained stability, its leaders must step up and take responsibility—by stepping down when it is time to go. Peaceful and fair transfer of power is essential to political stability, justice, economic development, and peace. Instead, corruption and greed are the leading forces in the politics of these countries. Isn't the constitution supposed to serve the people? In the case of these four countries, it seems to be for the benefit of those in power.



How many times will the people let this cycle of corruption and greed to destabilize thier countries? AFJN strongly condemns the tampering of constitutions and believes that in order to progress, leaders in the Great Lakes Region and all of Africa must abide by the rule of law and good governance.