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Mr. John Legend
Via e-mail

Dear Mr. Legend,

The Human Rights Foundation has learned of your plans to perform in Kigali, Rwanda, on Feb. 21, 2025, as part of Move Afrika — a collaboration between the Rwandan government, Global Citizen, and pgLang.

We respectfully urge you to cancel your Move Afrika concert in Kigali, following the example of Nigerian Grammy-winning artist Tems, and stand in solidarity with Rwandans and Congolese victims of the Rwandan regime's war.

While we commend your initiatives to promote Africa's talent, culture, and economic growth, we urge you to reconsider performing in Rwanda, where your presence risks legitimizing a dictatorship, led by Paul Kagame, which is currently waging a bloody war of aggression and plunder in the neighboring eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Your concert in Kigali would offer Rwanda's regime cover and distraction from the humanitarian catastrophe it is causing by supporting and deploying its own troops and resources alongside the US- and UN-sanctioned rebel group M23, which is linked to massacres of civilians, use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, recruitment of child soldiers, military aggression against foreign countries, and violent plunder of natural resources.

Since 2022, M23 has seized large parts of eastern DRC territory, establishing a reign of terror over civilians and illicitly plundering strategic mineral resources for the benefit of the Rwandan regime. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced in one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes. In the last few weeks, an escalating offensive by M23 and backed by Rwandan troops, seized eastern DRC's largest city of Goma and displaced more than 700,000 people.

The Rwandan regime's support for M23 violates international and United States laws. M23 is under sanctions from the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and the Rwandan regime has also been sanctioned under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act over M23's recruitment of child soldiers.

Paul Kagame's regime maintains an iron grip over Rwanda, suppressing dissent through mass surveillance, forced disappearances, imprisonment of critics, and even assassinations of exiled dissidents. A

prominent example is the kidnapping and imprisonment of [Paul Rusesabagina](#), the real-life hero of the Hollywood film “Hotel Rwanda” and US permanent resident, for more than 900 days. The regime also planted [spyware](#) on the phones of his daughter Carine Kanimba, also a US citizen. Don Cheadle and the cast of “The Avengers” joined the campaign for Rusesabagina’s release and his return to his home in San Antonio, Texas. While [nearly half of Rwandans live in poverty](#), Kagame diverts state resources to PR campaigns — hosting prestigious international events such as Move Afrika — [mansions](#), lobbyists, and [global sports sponsorships](#).

We believe Kagame aims to exploit the festival and manipulate your prestige, presence, and influence to project a deceptive image of normalcy, prosperity, and legitimacy. Simply put: While perhaps unbeknownst to you, your appearance will serve to distract from Kagame’s bloody war in Congo and propaganda for his 24-year-old dictatorship, as well as a trail of historic international crimes, including “[war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide](#).”

As a highly successful and socially conscious figure in the music industry who has previously elevated social justice causes and human rights, including through [your support](#) of Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign, **we respectfully urge you to cancel your Move Afrika concert in Kigali**, following the [example](#) of Nigerian Grammy-winning artist Tems. We encourage you to instead use your platform and influence to support the global struggle for freedom, including in Rwanda.

We are happy to educate you more on the topic and discuss alternative ways you can support the people of Rwanda.

We invite you to use your global influence to support the struggle for freedom and justice around the world and look forward to continuing the conversation. If you have any questions, please contact me at (212) 246-8486 or by e-mail at mo@hrf.org.

Sincerely,



Mohamed Keita
Senior Policy Officer, Africa
Human Rights Foundation