

Rwanda Agrees to Accept US Deportees Under New Bilateral Deal

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Kigali, Rwanda, has confirmed a new agreement with the United States to receive up to 250 individuals deported from American territory. The deal, announced this week, allows Rwanda to assess and approve each deportee on a case-by-case basis.

Yolande Makolo, spokesperson for the Rwandan government, said the specifics are still being finalised. However, she stressed that Rwanda retains full discretion over which

individuals it will admit.

This arrangement makes Rwanda the third African country to formalise such a deal with the US, following similar agreements with South Sudan and Eswatini. Both nations have previously drawn criticism for their handling of deportees and limited legal protections for those returned.

In July, the US deported 13 individuals classified as dangerous criminals to South Sudan and Eswatini. Reports raised concerns about a lack of due process and potential mistreatment post-arrival. One related case involved eight men from countries including Cuba, Mexico, Myanmar, and Laos who were reportedly held in a converted shipping container at a US base in Djibouti before being sent to South Sudan. Their current status is unknown, and no public information has been released by South Sudanese authorities.

Five others from Yemen, Cuba, Jamaica, Vietnam, and Laos were deported to Eswatini, where they were reportedly held in solitary confinement. A local human rights lawyer has filed legal action, alleging the men were denied legal representation. Eswatini, ruled by Africa's last absolute monarch, has faced sustained international criticism over its legal and political systems.

The US government has not disclosed the financial or political terms of its agreement with Rwanda. Similar past deals have involved undisclosed incentives.

According to Makolo, Rwanda intends to offer support services to approved deportees. "Those accepted will receive workforce training, healthcare, and accommodation assistance," she said. "Our national ethos is based on reintegration and rehabilitation."

The agreement reflects Rwanda's broader strategy to position itself as a reliable and stable partner on international issues. Under President Paul Kagame, in office since 2000, Rwanda has cultivated a reputation for regional security and economic development. However, questions persist over its treatment of political opposition and civil liberties.

This latest deal with Washington follows Rwanda's earlier agreement with the United Kingdom in 2022, which aimed to relocate illegal migrants arriving via irregular routes, particularly across the English Channel. Though initiated by the UK Conservative government, the agreement was later ruled unlawful by the Supreme Court in 2023 due to safety concerns.

Since taking office, the Labour government has abandoned the UK-Rwanda plan without introducing a replacement policy. Critics argue the government has failed to deliver an effective immigration deterrent, despite ongoing illegal Channel crossings and unclear enforcement measures.

The US-Rwanda deportation agreement has drawn scrutiny from legal experts. Amnesty International UK warned the deal may breach international protections, including the principle of non-refoulement, which bars the return of individuals to countries where they may face harm.

Rwandan political analyst Gonzaga Muganwa offered a broader interpretation, suggesting the deal serves Kigali's international interests. "Appeasing President Trump pays. This agreement strengthens Rwanda's strategic ties with the Trump administration," he told the Associated Press.

As Western nations continue to seek offshore solutions to manage deportations, Rwanda's role in these arrangements is becoming increasingly prominent, though concerns remain over the rights and welfare of those being removed.