Rwanda is a nation in east central Africa, located just south of the equator. It is bordered by Uganda on the north, Tanzania on the east, Burundi on the south, and the Democratic Republic of Congo on the west. Rwanda is small and largely mountainous. But it is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. It was at one time a colony of Germany and then governed by Belgium, before winning independence in 1962.

People

Rwanda's population is made up of three main ethnic groups. They are the Hutu (or Bahutu), the Tutsi (also called Batutsi or Watutsi), and the Twa (or Batwa).

The great majority of the people are Hutu. Most are farmers, who live mainly in the western part of the country. Hutu homes have a distinctive beehive shape and thatched roofs. They are usually built individually on hills rather than grouped in villages.

The Tutsi are generally slender in appearance and often quite tall. They are traditionally herders of cattle. Although much smaller in numbers, the Tutsi long dominated the majority Hutu, who were forced to work the land for them. Political and ethnic tensions between them have erupted into violence several times. The most serious outbreak occurred in 1994.

Only a few thousand Twa still exist. Most live in the northern mountains as hunters and as gatherers of fruits and nuts.

The Hutu and Tutsi speak Kinyarwanda, a Bantu language, which is one of the country's two official languages. The other is French, which dates from the time of Belgian rule. About half the people are Christians, mostly Roman Catholics. The remainder practice traditional African religions.

Land

Most of Rwanda consists of mountains and plateaus, with an average elevation of more than 6,000 feet (1,830 meters). The highest peak is Mount Karisimbi. It rises to 14,780 feet (4,505 meters) in the Virunga mountain range in the northwest. Lake Kivu is the largest of the country's many lakes. It is situated on the western border.

Although close to the equator, Rwanda has a generally moderate climate because of its elevation. The average annual temperature is about 68°F (18°C) throughout much of the country. The Lake Kivu region is much warmer, however, and the mountainous areas cooler.
Average annual rainfall ranges from 40 to 60 inches (1,000 to 1,500 millimeters).

Rwanda has only one major city, Kigali, the capital. Much of its population, estimated at about 250,000, fled during the recent civil strife and are only slowly returning.

**Economy**

Most of Rwanda's people are subsistence farmers, meaning they grow food for their own use. The main food crops are cassava, sorghum, millet, and bananas. In addition to cattle, goats and sheep also are raised as livestock. The leading commercial crop is coffee, Rwanda's chief export. Other cash crops are cotton, tea, and pyrethrum, used in making insecticides.

Tin ore (cassiterite) is the country's chief mineral resource. Rwanda also has deposits of tungsten ore and gold. And it is thought to have large reserves of natural gas beneath Lake Kivu. Industry is limited mainly to processed agricultural products.

**Government**

Under a new constitution, adopted in 2003, Rwanda's president is elected for a 7-year term by popular vote. He is eligible for a second term. The president appoints a prime minister and a Cabinet, the Council of Ministers. Rwanda's Parliament consists of a 26-seat Senate and an 80-seat Chamber of Deputies. Senators serve 8-year terms, and deputies serve 5-year terms. The Supreme Court, Rwanda's highest court, consists of a court president, a vice president, and 12 judges.

**History**

What is now Rwanda became part of the colony of German East Africa in the late 1800s as a result of a treaty with the mwami, or king, of the Tutsi, who ruled the territory. After Germany's defeat in World War I (1914–18), Rwanda and what is now Burundi were administered by Belgium. The combined territory was then called Ruanda-Urundi. Belgium continued to govern the region as a trust territory of the United Nations following the end of World War II (1939–45). The first ethnic clashes broke out in 1959, when the Hutu revolted against the Tutsi. After much bloodshed, the Tutsi king was deposed. Many Tutsi fled the country. In 1961, supported by the Belgian colonists, the Hutu majority voted to establish a republic. Separated from Urundi (now Burundi), it formally gained independence as the Republic of Rwanda in 1962.

Rwanda's first president, Gregoire Kayibanda, governed until 1973, when he was overthrown by the military. General Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, became president under a new one-party constitution, approved in 1978. He was re-elected in 1983 and in 1988.

**Recent History**

In 1990, Rwandan exiles, mainly Tutsi, invaded the country from Uganda, setting off a civil war. A 1991 constitutional revision provided for multiparty elections, and in 1993 the government signed a peace accord with the rebel Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1994, Hutu president Habyarimana, died in a plane crash under suspicious circumstances. Immediately
thereafter, highly organized massacres of Tutsi and moderate Hutu began. Led by the presidential guard, Hutu soldiers and civilians killed at least 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu from April to June 1994. About three-quarters of Rwanda's Tutsi people were killed.

The RPF then resumed the civil war and quickly occupied most of the country. In July 1994 a primarily Tutsi government, dominated by the RPF, was installed. Fearing vengeance, as many as 2 million Hutus fled to neighboring countries. Many refugees have since returned, but tensions remain high. In November 1994, the United Nations established a special court to prosecute those responsible for the genocide (mass killing) of Tutsi and moderate Hutus.

In 1998, a United Nations war crimes tribunal sentenced a former premier, Jean Kambanda, a Hutu, to life imprisonment for his part in the 1994 massacres. He was the first person in history to be sentenced by a nonmilitary international court for genocide. In May 2000, RPF chairman Paul Kagame became Rwanda's first Tutsi president. He was re-elected, to a 7-year term, in 2003. The first multiparty parliamentary elections since 1994 were also held, bringing an end to the transitional period of government.

President Kagame was re-elected to another 7-year term in August 2010 with 93 percent of the vote. But prior to, during, and after the election, Rwanda witnessed violence and government repression. Anti-Kagame newspapers were suspended. One journalist was killed, others were arrested. Opposition leaders were banned from running for office, and one was killed. Kagame's regime continued to ignore the views of the opposition and to put limits on its activities. Many feared that democracy was at stake in the country.

Nevertheless, under Kagame's presidency, corruption and crime were brought under control. Greater opportunities were made for women, more children went to school, and the economy boomed. Rwanda became one of the most business-friendly nations in Africa. Kagame was credited with these social and economic improvements. As a result, his Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) won in a landslide in the 2013 parliamentary elections. Kagame himself won another term in 2017 with 98.8% of the vote.

Rwanda joined the East African Community (EAC) in 2007. Its other members were Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The goal of the EAC, founded in 2000, was to promote political and economic cooperation among its member states.

In 2014, a French court convicted Pascal Simbikangwa, a Hutu, of genocide in 1994. He was found guilty of playing a major role in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis.

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