

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

This thesis has described the process in which the Commonwealth of Nations contributed toward human rights enforcement, specifically freedom of press in Rwanda. The research question of this thesis is: How did the Commonwealth of Nations contribute to the human rights enforcement in Rwanda, specifically the Freedom of Press? The theoretical basis that was used to determine the answer was the theory of constructivism, with the middle range theory of the spiral model of human rights change cultivated by Sikkink, Risse, and Ropp. The theory has five steps, which aims to explain the socialization and internalization processes of human rights values within states. The freedom of press was chosen as the human rights branch highlighted in this thesis due to the persistence of the issue in Rwanda, which tied back to how the media was a significant catalyst to the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

This research found that the Commonwealth contributed to elevate press freedom in Rwanda mainly by providing external pressure to the government alongside other international organizations. The process could be seen starting from the first phase of the spiral model, which is the repression by the state and the activation of the international advocacy network. It was clear that the restrictions on press in Rwanda continued, even as the state became a member of the Commonwealth. Many reporters faced jail time, blocked from publishing, fled the country, and even lost their lives due to expressing criticism against the

government. Journalists then actively engaged with international human rights groups to spread information and raise awareness about their conditions. Unfortunately, while numerous international human rights groups were actively speaking up for Rwandan journalists, the Commonwealth was criticized for their lack of activity in advancing freedom of press. Other than that, perhaps in a peculiar turn of events, the Commonwealth also contributed to restricting press coverage during the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Rwanda's capital, Kigali.

As the process continued, the second phase was marked by further dissemination of information regarding press freedom violations in Rwanda. Several international institutions, such as Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International, were actively calling out the Rwandan government for their setbacks in protecting Rwandan journalists. These pleas turned into pressure for the government, but President Kagame responded sharply by vehemently denying accusations of human rights violations. Kagame made his belief clear that media control is necessary to keep Rwanda's stability. There were regulations protecting media freedom on paper, but they stand in contrast with the government's contradictory implementation. The Commonwealth contributed to the pressure directed at the government by participating in an open letter urging for Rwanda's accountability in enforcing freedom of press. Even so, the organization was mainly a follower and not an instigator since there were no notable actions done in Rwanda where the Commonwealth took leadership in its practice. There was sparse documentation on the concrete actions the Commonwealth took to advance press

freedom in Rwanda, as well as tangible effects of the Commonwealth's programs in the state.

The process of human rights socialization in Rwanda is currently on Phase Three of the spiral model. The main indicator fulfilled in this phase was Rwanda's ratification of several international agreements on human rights, which made it seem as if Rwanda intended to comply with international human rights standards. But this can be considered as purely strategic because the implementation of human rights values in Rwanda was contradictory and problematic. Furthermore, most of the pressure directed toward the government came from the outside by members of the international community. Internal pressure from within Rwanda was not strong enough due to government restrictions and journalists who were supposed to be the internal opposition sporadically spread around many places. Unfortunately, other than the Commonwealth's contribution in giving normative statements in an attempt to put pressure on the government, significant actions from the organization was vague.

Furthermore, out of the four elements of freedom of expression stated in the 2013 Commonwealth Charter; peaceful and open dialogue, free flow of information, free and responsible media, and the enhancement of democratic processes, Rwanda noticeably fell short in at least three of those points. When it comes to the free flow of information, the internet and social media was accessible by the public in the country, hence there was indeed a certain degree of availability in accessing news online. However, there were instances where the government shut down online news sites and platforms that expressed criticism. The same issue,

alongside the government hostility against opposition and overbearing restrictions in general, also contributed to the inability of Rwanda to achieve the remaining elements of freedom of expression defined in the Commonwealth Charter.

To conclude, there are two main problems found during this research when it comes to the Commonwealth's contribution. First, lack of documentation and publications. The website for the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) was inaccessible by the author during this research, hence there were not many sources explaining the Commonwealth's work in Rwanda. Hypothetically, other publications could have mentioned the Commonwealth, but that was also sparse. The second issue is the lack of initiatives from the Commonwealth itself. Other international organizations and groups are noticeably more active in speaking up for the freedom of press in Rwanda. It is understandable that international organizations often struggle with encouraging significant changes in states since most of them do not have legal power over states. Even organizations that are legally binding sometimes face difficulties in getting Member States to comply. Even so, as many of these international organizations have done, the Commonwealth needs to be more vocal in the fight for its causes. In general, states join international organizations because of their relevancy, values, and resources they add to their members. If the Commonwealth have any desire to maintain its relevance and elevate its significance globally, the organization needs to make its presence known. It may be a lengthy process until press freedom is fully guaranteed in Rwanda, but unless the Commonwealth starts becoming more active in its

program implementation, it sits idly as a forum of discussion that lacks action, influence, and value.

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