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MEMORANDUM TO THE UNITED NATIONS: "A CONTRIBUTION TO THE UN STRATEGY FOR PEACE CONSOLIDATION, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION"

A CALL FOR HIGHLY INCLUSIVE INTER RWANDAN DIALOGUE AS "A POLITICAL CONFLICT AVOIDANCE DEVICE" FOR PEACE IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

I. Background

I.1. Historical context

The political history of Rwanda is characterized by a cycle of political violence due mainly to lack of good governance. Even though the nature and intensity of the violence may vary from period to period, the root cause is mainly bad governance.

Political transfer of power in Rwanda during the period of the monarchy and of the republican regimes has often been marked by violence. The most notorious violent political change during the monarchy was what it came to be known as the coup d'état of Rucunshu when the legitimate king Rutarindwa was ousted, killed with all family and entourage, and replaced by his half-brother Musinga.

The period prior to Rwanda's accession to independence, was marked by the emergence of political forces that demanded reforms in the political governance of the country and an equitable inclusive social economic development. These demands were rejected by the King's council even though they were supported by the majority of ordinary people and political elite that included some prominent tutsi. This caught the attention of the Belgian government¹. Generalized social injustices, political radicalisation between those who supported change and those who wanted to maintain the status quo in the political governance of the country as well as the wind of change blowing over Africa for political independence produced a fertile ground for the political violence that forced thousands of citizens into exile and claimed many lives.

The post-independence period was characterized by armed attacks coordinated by refugees until late 1960s. In 1973, Rwanda experienced a Coup d'état which instituted a governance system based on of a single political party rule. Once again, several politicians were assassinated.

While the coup during the monarchy was a Tutsi against another Tutsi and that Tutsi killed each other, brother against brother, during the republican regime it was a Hutu overthrowing another Hutu and Hutu were killed by power holders, former friends and colleagues.

What is common to all these systems of government is lack of political inclusion and participation, absence of the principles of political tolerance and compromise "agreeing to disagree" and a culture of political consensus. This creates frustrations among citizens and particularly the elite which is politically active.

Between 1990 and 1994, refugees coordinated by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) waged a war that toppled the government in place. This attack was led under the banner of bringing about democracy and good governance as well as repatriating all refugees, among other objectives. During

¹ Rwanda was a colony of Belgian Kingdom



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this war, attempts of dialogue were initiated ending in what is known as Arusha Peace Agreement concluded between two belligerent parties but were never implemented.

Instead, the former Head of State was assassinated, and the war resumed culminating in genocide against Tutsi, war crimes and crimes against humanity. RPF secured a military victory while millions of citizens were driven into exile. In summary, the war launched to repatriate refugees created many more refugees and led to the death of thousands of citizens.

Today, 28 years after the horrendous tragedy, the dream of reconciled nation and good governance is still elusive, thousands of refugees are scattered all over the world, with so many political prisoners. Citizens are unhappy². Armed groups have been formed to fight the government and relations with neighbours are at an incredibly low level. We believe the international community has a moral obligation to do something to avoid the worst to happen again. Not doing so is putting its reputation at stake.

I.2. Geopolitical context

This memorandum is partly inspired by the United Nations Strategy for Peace in the Great Lakes Region. While roots and drivers of conflicts were defined satisfactorily in this strategy, it is important to underline the lack of tangible, realistic and effective measures to be taken at national levels.

We were pleased to see that in December 2020, the UN put in place a global and ambitious strategy commonly known as UN strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. However, we have noted with great concern that UN did not integrate in this strategy issues of governance in Rwanda, yet the political crisis in the Great Lakes Region stems mainly from the lack of good governance in Rwanda.

It is in this regard that, working within the letter and spirit of the UN's strategy for peace, the Rwandan opposition parties have prepared a Road Map for a Promising Future of Rwanda which highlights the steps, measures and programme that can help bring a lasting peace in Great Lakes Region using dialogue as a key tool.

We want to draw the attention of the UN on how good governance in Rwanda can play a significant role in the stabilisation of the Great Lakes region and draw up some solutions as laid down in the attached copy of the Road Map prepared by the Rwandan opposition parties and which was submitted to the Rwandan Government on 24 June 2021. As key stakeholders in a peaceful and prosperous Rwanda, working at grassroots level, experiencing first-hand the strains and stresses of our people, coupled with our first-hand experiences we can claim that we are in an ideal position to inform any strategy aiming at bringing last peace and stability in Rwanda and in the sub region of the Great lakes in general.

I.3. About the authors

This memorandum is prepared in collaboration of main opposition parties and some civil societies which are investing in a peaceful change in Rwanda. Two oppositions parties are based in Rwanda, DALFA UMURINZI and Social Party Imberakuri respectively represented by Mrs Victoire INGABIRE UMUHOZA and Me NTAGANDA Bernard while other organizations are based abroad. The memorandum is based on the Road Map mentioned above that highlights the Inter- Rwandan Inclusive Dialogue as a "political conflict avoidance device" in Rwanda but also in Great Lakes Region.

II. The Road Map for a Promising Future of Rwanda

² [Happiness, benevolence, and trust during COVID-19 and beyond | The World Happiness Report](#)



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Our proposal for which we seek support is provided in the Constitution of Rwanda³ and falls within the United Nations strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region⁴.

II.1. The process of political dialogue in Rwanda

During the 1990-1994 war, numerous initiatives were undertaken to resolve the conflict between the RPF and the Government of Rwanda. The most known is Arusha Peace Agreement signed on August 4th 1993. The Arusha Peace Agreement did not work out because power sharing was based on the balance of military force and not on political consensus where all Rwandan stakeholders took part. Only the political elite vying for power were represented. With hindsight there are reasons to suggest that some of the RPF leadership was more concerned with taking all the power rather than with power sharing.

The collapse of the Arusha Peace Agreement was a missed opportunity for Rwandans to work out a solution that would have contributed to building the country as a nation. Unfortunately, after the RPF military victory, Arusha Peace Agreement was abandoned by the new government.

Between 1998 and 1999 consultations were held under what is known as Urugwiro Consultations that involved political actors, religious leaders, members of the media⁵. The Urugwiro Consultations which constituted another window of opportunity to redress the situation did not bring about any solution because they were more top down rather than bottom up and lacked the real spirit of dialogue. It was more about mobilising participants to embrace and spread the RPF political interpretation of history and political programme.

II.2. The need of an Inclusive Inter Rwandan Dialogue

Today, more than two decades after, some of the resolutions of Urugwiro Consultations have become irrelevant while others need renewed commitment and adjustments. For instance, the resolution to solve problems via national dialogue has been a total failure. Instead of holding inclusive dialogue, in what is known as Umushyikirano, this has become a platform to praise the ruling party, a place that excludes the political opposition as well as whoever holds a dissenting view from the ruling party policies and mode of governance.

The political space is tightly controlled, and this led several political observers to call Rwanda a police state. While the Law provides for a political pluralism, there exists unmistakable evidence of refusal to register new organizations which manifested their intent to engage in political competition.

As of today, the last registration of a new political party took place 13 years ago. This cannot be right in a country that claims to hold elections regularly. The independent candidates do not run any better chance either. Apart from the obstacles raised along their way, the legal framework seems to aim at getting them out of the contest. For instance, many candidates from a genuine opposition have been thrown into prison before elections. This is what have experienced Mme Victoire INGABIRE UMUHOZA and Me NTAGANDA Bernard before the presidential elections of 2010⁶ and Miss Diane Rwigara in 2017⁷.

³ The preamble of the Constitution of Rwanda in its latest revised version states the commitment to “*building a State based on consensual and pluralistic democracy founded on power sharing, national unity and reconciliation, good governance, development, social justice, tolerance and resolution of problems through dialogue*” Alinea 6.

⁴ https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_1168_e.pdf

⁵ https://www.nurc.gov.rw/fileadmin/Documents/Others/Unity_and_Reconciliation__Process_in_Rwanda.pdf

⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/08/02/rwanda-silencing-dissent-ahead-elections>

⁷ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session84/A_HRC_WGAD_2019_24.pdf



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To solve the problem outlined in this memo, a proposal was formulated by two political leaders based in Rwanda who were joined by others later, based abroad. The proposal presented in the ROAD MAP FOR A PROMISING FUTURE OF RWANDA⁸ seeks to bring together the government of Rwanda and all dissenting voices in an Inter Rwandan Dialogue to discuss issues affecting governance and democracy in Rwanda. It would cover the following issues: Inclusive political processes, reconciliation, rule of law, human rights, sustainable development, and shared prosperity.

Indeed, the political crisis in the Great Lakes Region stems mainly from the lack of good governance in Rwanda. This is not a fiction neither an exaggeration. Rwanda is a focal point of tensions in the Great Lakes region due to its political system that excludes political opposition, and this forced many Rwandans into exile. The latter in return form armed groups operating in neighbouring countries and are determined to return in the country by force.

From what is said above, the Great Lakes Region cannot experience stability as long as Rwanda refuses to establish a system based on good governance and the latter can be achieved only through an Inclusive Inter Rwandan Dialogue⁹. This is the only way to remove all reasons to exercise political activities outside Rwanda and create armed insurgencies with intent to take over the power in Rwanda by force. Moreover, the inclusive dialogue will encourage refugees to return home without fear, opening up space for Rwandans interested into politics and allowing them to compete for power based on political programs and applying peaceful means that safeguard and build on what has achieved.

II.3. Expected outcomes

Some of the key outcomes include, *inter alia*:

- Opening political space that will lead to increased political participation.
- Promoting the culture of negotiation and compromise for the national interest.
- Removing reasons for people to form political parties abroad or to resort to the use of force to change government or access to power
- Creating conditions that will encourage the confidence of refugees to return
- Creating conditions for peaceful competition and transfer of power.
- Promoting the creation of political parties around political program not along ethnicity or regionalism
- Creating a culture of appreciating and building on what has been achieved by other regimes.
- Eliminating tensions between different countries of the Great Lakes Region.

II.4. Expected results from the Inclusive Inter-Rwandans Dialogue

As pointed out the key issue that has led to political instability and violence has been political, social economic exclusion which in turn has been due to **lack of good governance**, and **lack of political will**. The various regimes have tended to talk down to people instead of listening to them. An all-Inclusive Inter Rwandans Dialogue will create space for all key stakeholders and not only the political elite to examine together the root causes of the cycle of political violence in Rwanda and to propose legal and policy initiatives and mechanisms to break that cycle.

From our own analysis, national conflicts result from non-inclusive political regimes which by nature are not able to guarantee the respect of human rights and freedoms of the citizens. In this regard it is our view that lack of political space, of freedom of assembly and association as well as grave violation of fundamental human rights constitute a hindrance to peace and stability and deserves the most serious attention of the strategy. As the Universal declaration of Human Rights points out in its

⁸ <https://dalfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ROAD-MAP-FOR-A-PROMISING-FUTURE-OF-RWANDA.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/12/10/intra-rwandan-dialogue-is-crucial-for-peace-in-the-great-lakes>



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preamble: “it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

Equally the experience of the last 28 years has demonstrated that internal problem in one country impacts on other countries. It is particularly so between Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC that were under the same colonial ruler and have the same populations across borders. For example, Rwanda invaded the DRC under the pretext that it was going to save Tutsi in the DRC that were supposedly under threat of genocide. Rwanda has entered in the DRC also under the pretext that it was for her security interests. Rwanda has also been accused of supporting rebel groups in the DRC to destabilise the country to plunder her resources. All this calls for a comprehensive approach that considers the political situation in each country. This applies to Rwanda in particular accused by DRC and Burundi of wanted to create chaos in those countries.

Due to intertwined essence of the region, any confrontation in one country has impact on the whole region as experienced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In fact, failing to name Rwanda as the main source of the today insecurity in the East of the DRC would be hypocritical. The UN Mapping report¹⁰ is a testimony. Therefore, regional conflicts rise from national unresolved political and socioeconomic issues of which consequences have cross-border reaching.

II.5. The role of the UN

The UN has initiated this ambitious strategy for a lasting peace in the Great Lakes region through dialogue, it is understood that this strategy needs to integrate our proposal in its strategy and to play a key role to facilitate the dialogue between the Rwandan Government and its opposition as it has happened elsewhere in the region.

Indeed, the UN strategy sees peaceful transfers of power in Burundi and the DRC as “*positive dynamics*” and sets **peace security and justice** as the first of its three pillars. These dynamics should be emulated in other countries of the region in general, and in Rwanda in particular, before the presidential elections of 2024.

In conclusion, we are of the view that it is not possible to stabilize the Great Lakes Region without resolving the political, socio- economic grievances in Rwanda. Thus, to make the strategy an effective tool of real change we find useful, meaningful, and even imperative that the UN:

- *Include the proposed highly inclusive inter Rwandan dialogue in the action plan of the United Nations strategy for Peace Consolidation and Conflict Resolution and Prevention in the Great Lakes region*
- *Take responsibility as an overseer of the Inclusive Inter Rwandan dialogue.*
- *Support all political actors and civil society organisations in their effort to bring all stakeholders together to chart a new vision of Rwanda.*
- *Provide financial and logistical support to stakeholders where need arises.*

In addition, to this memorandum, we attach the ROAD MAP DOCUMENT to permit an efficient perusal and a deep analysis as we remain at disposal for eventual discussions.

Done on 06 May 2022

¹⁰ [Mapping Report – Rapport du Projet Mapping sur les violations des droits de l’homme et droit international commise entre 1993 et 2003 en République démocratique du Congo \(mapping-report.org\)](http://mapping-report.org)



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