

## **Open letter to the President of the Republic of Rwanda on proposals for measures to better manage the Covid-19 crisis in Rwanda**

Mr. President,

We, the undersigned Rwandans living abroad, feel deeply sorry and stand in solidarity with our compatriots at home for the suffering and difficulties of all kinds that they are enduring during this harsh health crisis caused by coronavirus (COVID\_19) pandemic. Many Rwandans, especially those living in rural areas, are living in economic precariousness as a result of the far-reaching change in the agricultural policy which has ruined their food security. The resulting rural exodus has created a high rise in urban population living from hand to mouth because of an unsustainable economic boom that has failed to create viable jobs.

We are confident that the age-old spirit of solidarity and resilience that characterizes the Rwandan people will enable them to valiantly weather this harsh ordeal. But for this to happen, the government will need to take on complaints and pragmatic advice from its concerned citizens, more than in the past. We ourselves are committed to continuing to reflect on a range of actions of solidarity that would enable us to alleviate the suffering of our compatriots at home, and we will communicate on this in due course. In the meantime, we are sending you, by this letter, a contribution in the form of a few ideas, which we consider useful and practical, easy to implement quickly in order to stem the harmful consequences of the measures your government continues to take to combat the COVID\_19 crisis.

### **Some resources that can be mobilized rapidly;**

While waiting for the people, taken by surprise by this scourge, to recover and for both national and international solidarity to produce positive impact, we would like to draw your kind attention to the existence of a certain number of internal resources that can be immediately mobilized, in case they have escaped your attention and that of your collaborators.

It is worth remembering the Rwandan saying, "*Ukena ufite itungo rikakugoboka*", which translates as, "*When poverty knocks at the door, you rely on your savings*". It is important, indeed, that the population we are trying to save from the threat of COVID\_19 is not swept away by hunger in their confinement. The damage would be far greater than the damage we want to avoid. It is also important that Rwandans be able to draw on their reserves first while waiting for help from elsewhere.

### **1. Appeal for support from the "AGACIRO" fund;**

This fund, which bears an evocative name of "*Agaciro = Dignity*" was launched in 2012, with the stated objective of promoting self-sufficiency among Rwandans and this within the framework of the master plan which aims to raise Rwanda's human development from low to medium in 2020. It is time to take advantage of the results of [this fund which at the end of 2017 reached 52.3 billion Rwandan francs](#), of which [41.8 billion Rwandan francs came from contributions](#), while 10.5 billion Rwandan francs came from the investment income of the same Agaciro Fund. This is the time to use all this money made from the sweat of the Rwandan citizens.

## **2. Appeal for support from the significant wealth held by the RPF party-state;**

As you know, Mr. President, the RPF, a political organization that came to power in Rwanda a quarter of a century ago, is among the richest, if not the richest political party in the world. As of 30/07/2017, the RPF was already considered as the [country's largest private employer](#), whose [assets were estimated at some 500 million dollars](#). In your capacity as the chairman of the Party and President, in these difficult times, your party, the RPF could make a gesture of empathy towards the Rwandan people, by taking some of its immense wealth and help the most needy.

## **3. Release of prisoners in Rwandan prisons.**

Currently and officially, there are around 75,000 prisoners in the official Rwandan prisons. As you know, Mr. President, on March 25, 2020, even the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. BACHELET Michelle recommended to governments [to release "every person detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners, and those detained for critical, dissenting views"](#), as part of the fight against COVID\_19. This recommendation makes a lot of sense, particularly in the case of Rwanda where many prisoners have been locked up for several years without files. This would not only prevent the spread of the coronavirus epidemic in these prison environments but would also free up financial resources that could be immediately mobilized to help the most vulnerable members of the population.

It is true that, as of 1 April 2020, the General Prosecutor has sent a directive to the prosecutors to do so; but the directive is accompanied by vague and limiting conditionalities and only a small segment of the prison population could benefit from it.

## **4. The ISHEMA RYACU Fund set up at the time of General Karake's arrest in London on June 20, 2015 ;**

You will recall, Mr. President, that General Emmanuel Karenzi Karake, then head of the fearsome National Intelligence and Security Service, was arrested in 2015 in London on the basis of a European arrest warrant issued by Spain. He could only be released on bail of 1 million pounds (\$1.5 million) obtained by mobilising the contributions of the Rwandan people. This sum can and should be used immediately to support the most vulnerable sections of the population.

## **5. Repatriation of the funds stored in tax havens revealed in the "Panama Papers";**

Finally, Mr President, a recent World Bank study, based on data from 22 countries, including Rwanda, showed that World Bank aid regularly falls into the hands of predators who are quick to make deposits in external banks where banking secrecy is guaranteed, such as Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Cayman Islands or Singapore. For example, the survey showed that the World Bank has made largesse to Rwanda, which in 2018 received double the aid it used to receive in previous years, rising to \$545 million. [Researchers discovered during the investigation that \\$190 million left Rwanda and was deposited in tax havens](#). These funds, and others like them, must, for reasons of morality and practical efficiency, be quickly returned to the country to be used to alleviate the people's hardship in the face of this terrible coronavirus crisis.

## **Good use should be made of the funds from aid or credit facilities that the country may receive in these times;**

Mr. President, we learn that under the Rapid Credit Facility, [the International Monetary Fund has just granted Rwanda a rapid concessional financial assistance of \\$109.4 million](#) to help address the difficulties associated with managing the coronavirus pandemic. We dare hope that these funds,

which the Rwandan taxpayer will have to pay back, will really serve to alleviate the difficulties faced by the most vulnerable and will not end up in the pockets and accounts of the regime's powerful. The vulnerable group includes people whose homes have been demolished. Indeed, many of us were surprised to see that while the storm 'Covid\_19' was forecast, [Kigali city officials sent demolition workers to destroy houses in Nyarutarama village](#). The whole world witnessed these inhuman operations, marked by cruelty and lack of sensitivity and empathy towards these poor families, brutally thrown into the street without any other help. Worse still, [in your public intervention, you not only approved these operations to destroy these homes of the poor](#), but also reaffirmed what [you said in 2014 that the demolition workers were kind](#) because they could have swept the houses with their occupants inside them without mercy.

### **Investment experiences not to be repeated in the future:**

It has come to our attention that certain projects that have consumed huge amounts of public funds and that were commissioned under your full and complete responsibility, Mr. President, have turned out to be budgetary black holes.

1. For example, it is reported that [the OneWeb program](#) to which you committed funds estimated at some \$1.2 billion from Rwanda and other partners is bankrupt. It is known that decisions to commit those funds were made at your sole discretion. It is one of the projects whose contours remain unclear to many Rwandans. The people would benefit from a future ban on such practices in the management of public assets.
  2. The [Rwandan carrier "RWANDAIR"](#), which has swallowed up large sums of money in recent years, is currently finding its planes grounded with a high probability of not being able to fly again. It should be recalled that despite the huge sums of public funds that have been injected into it, this white elephant project has always been in the red financially. This is further proof of the discrepancy between your investment choices in recent years and the good father's predictions that should have been made.
  3. The "Visit Rwanda" deals saw one of the poorest countries in the world afford to grant some [33 million euros to the Arsenal club](#) and some 8 to 10 million euros per year - according to estimates - to the [Parisian club PSG](#). In the future, Mr. President, this kind of casino investment should be abandoned in favour of more realistic and more "good head of family" practices.
  4. Mr. President, another budget-consuming item of recent years that will have to be regulated as soon as possible is your travels abroad. The following figures are frightening;
    - In the first five months of 2014 alone, [experts have estimated the cost of your foreign travel at some \\$5.3 million](#).
    - In 2018, you made 59 trips abroad. In comparison, [US President Barack Obama made 52 trips abroad in his eight years as President](#). When we learn that the billing rate applied by Crystal Ventures Ltd, the RPF industrial conglomerate that you manage and to which the luxury jets you use belong, is 14,000 dollars per 14 hours, the extent of the budgetary damage caused to the public coffers by your trips is quickly understood.
    - In 2019, between January and October, [you participated in 45 events abroad](#), including the [graduation ceremony for your son at Williams College](#) | Williamstown, USA 20 in June 2019.
- If there is one positive effect to be remembered from the current coronavirus crisis, it is that you have slowed down your taste for travel. The state coffers are certainly relieved. We note that most of the major meetings are currently conducted via teleconferences. We are delighted about this and we can only encourage you to continue to proceed in the same way even after the crisis.

Mr. President, it is clear that if the resources associated with all these projects mentioned above, and the list is not limited, had been invested in health projects, medical training, adequate payment of teachers, and other projects close to the concerns of the citizen, they would have been of great use to the Rwandan people in these difficult times.

All these projects and so many others of pure prestige will serve as lessons for those who are or will be in charge of our country in future to be pragmatic and far-sighted.

Most importantly, Mr. President, we propose that, as soon as we come out of this crisis, you should dare take firm decisions and agree to open up the Rwandan political space, the only way to free all the energies of the people of Rwanda currently being constrained by the frequent violations of human rights by the regime you lead.

In this regard, opposition groups have repeatedly reached out to you, offering to engage with all the active forces of the country. So far you have preferred to respond with contempt and witch hunt for the opponents.

We urge you, Mr. President, to re-examine your stance and listen, for once, to the voice of the people who are crying out for a change in mentalities and methods of governance and yearning for truth and freedom for all.

The signatories of the present letter are ready to make a positive contribution to a process of change towards lasting social peace can be initiated and achieved.

Done on April 9, 2020

**The signatories:**

1. Laurent Munyandilikirwa, Président de l'Observatoire des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda (ODHR);
2. Emery Nshimiyimana, Secrétaire Général de la Fondation IBUKABOSE-RENGERABOSE, Mémoire et Justice pour tous ;
3. Jean Marie Ndagijimana, Coordinateur du Comité pour l'Unité, la Paix et la Réconciliation au Rwanda (CUPR) ;
4. René Mugenzi, Coordinateur de Global Campaign for Rwandans's Human Rights (GCRHR);
5. Joseph Matata, Coordinateur du Centre de Lutte contre l'Impunité et l'Injustice au Rwanda (CLIIR);
6. Theobald Rutihunza, Président du Réseau International pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda (RIPRODHOR) ;
7. Robert Mugabowindekwe, President de JAMBO asbl ;
8. Calixte Kanani, Coordinateur du Comité de Suivi de la Problématique des Réfugiés Rwandais (CSPR) ;
9. Aloys Simpunga, Initiative HUMURA ;
10. JMV Nyirimbirima, Chairperson the Global Voice of Rwandan Refugees (GVRR)
11. Stany Rwandarugari, Rwandan Platform for Dialogue, Truth, and Justice (RDTJ)
12. Marcelline Nyiranduamungu, Présidente du Réseau international des Femmes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RifDP);
13. Pascal Kalinganire, General Coordinator of the Organization for Peace, Justice and Development in Rwanda and Great Lakes Region (OPJDR);

14. Pierre Claver Nkinamubanzi, Président du Congrès rwandais du Canada (CRC);
15. Nelson Gatsimbazi, Rwandiska föreningen för mänskliga rättigheter (RFMR);
16. Rugema Kayumba, Norway Sub Sahara Africa development organisation(NSADO);
17. Celestin Muhindura, President of Rwanda National Forum (RNF);
18. Gilbert Mwenedata, Président de l'initiative du Peuple pour l'Alliance Démocratique (IPAD) ;
19. Emmanuel Mugenzi, Coordinator in charge of political matters, Rwandan Alliance for the National Pact (RANP-Abaryankuna) ;
20. Jean Damascène Munyampeta, Secrétaire Général du Pacte Démocratique du Peuple (PDP-IMANZI) ;
21. Général Emmanuel Habyarimana, Président de la Convention Nationale Républicaine (CNR-Intwari) ;
22. JABO AKISHULI, Secrétaire Exécutif, UNITED FREEDOM FIGHTERS (UFF- INDANGAMIRWA);
23. Jérôme Nayigiziki, Coordinateur, RNC-Ihuriro ;
24. Jean Baptiste Ryumugabe, Coordinateur PSI-Imberakuri ;
25. Etienne Masozera, Président AMAHORO-PC ;
26. Justin Bahunga, Président FDU-INKINGI;
27. Nadine Claire Kasinge, Présidente ISHEMA PARTY;
28. Anastase Gasana, President Democratic Rwanda Party, DRP-ABASANGIZI;
29. Paul Rusesabagina, Vice President, Mouvement rwandais pour le Changement démocratique (MRCD).