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**COMITE DIRECTEUR – STEERING COMMITTEE**

*"Pour un Etat de Droit, la Democratie et l'Egalité de chances" ; "For the rule of law, democracy and equal opportunity"*

**PRESS RELEASE**

**RWANDA: SUSPICIOUS FIRES IN DETENTION CENTRES SHOULD CATCH THE ATTENTION OF THE RWANDAN AUTHORITIES.**

Fire gutted the Kigali Maximun Security Prison commonly known as "1930 prison" in the afternoon of the 25th of December 2016, ironically on the day of Christmas celebrations worldwide. The fire incident happened when people were still remembering a similar fire incident in Muhanga prison in central Rwanda on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, which was followed only a month later by another fire in Gisenyi prison on the 7th of July 2014. The fire in Kigali Maximun Security prison, which allegedly took over all the prison services unawares, was announced only by the press and the cause of the fire is reported to be unknown to date. Images showing a thick black and opaque smoke coming out of the prison, have led to fears that the damages caused by the fire could be more than what is officially reported, given the fact that no independent investigation has taken place.

It is legitimate to wonder what the consequences of this fire could have been on the prison inmates. It is known that what kills in a fire is not so much the fire but the opacity and toxicity of the fumes. Different sources reported incidents of panic attacks among inmates and prolonged sounds of gun fire from small arms. For the sake of transparency, we hope that all the light will be shed on the origin of this fire, as well as the damages, mainly in terms of human lives, caused either by the fire or by the firing by prison guards. We dare hope that the inmates who tried to escape from this fire were not shot deliberately, on the pretext that they were trying to escape! We may recall that in the case of Muhanga prison, the victims had been underestimated by the authorities and later for the whole year of 2014, the authorities announced that 30,000 prisoners could have escaped from Rwandan prisons.

Given this succession of fires that sporadically affect the most populous prisons (Kigali, Gisenyi, Muhanga), the FDU-Inkingi political party calls upon the Rwandan government to ensure the safety of prisoners who are at risk of being caught in the crossfire of the burning buildings and the shooting by prison guards.

We call upon Johnston Busingye, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, who bears the primary responsibility to safeguard the lives and safety of Rwandan citizens in detention centres, to ensure that international standards in relation to the treatment of prisoners are fully respected and request him to take all necessary and appropriate measures to meet all legal obligations to protect and make prison centres secure.

Done in Paris, France, on December 27, 2016

For FDU-Inkingi  
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