

Rwandans appeal to Organization of African Unity to help restore peace

The following “Appeal to the OAU to Restore Peace and Security in Rwanda” was issued by Rwanda’s Rally for the Return of Democracy and Refugees (RDR), over the signature of its President, François Nzabihimana.

Brussels, May 21, 1998

His Excellency Mr. Blaise Compaoré
President of the Republic of Burkina Faso
Current Chairman of the OAU
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

cc. Heads of State and Government of OAU member countries

Your Excellency, Mr. President:

Our organization, the RDR, is a political rally of Rwandan citizens resolutely committed to the rule of law in Rwanda and to democracy, as the basis for true reconciliation, and lasting peace and development in our country. We have repeatedly condemned the genocide carried out against Tutsis, as well as the ongoing genocide of Hutus. We have demanded that the authors of crimes of genocide, of crimes against peace and humanity, and of human rights violations, regardless of their positions or ethnic group, be identified and forced, each individually, to answer for their acts. In our view, the International Court for Rwanda is the only appropriate framework to try those responsible for such crimes. The purview of this court should be extended so that it may try not only crimes against humanity, as defined in Resolution No. 955/1994 of the United Nations Security Council, but also, beyond the limits of its statutes, crimes against peace and war crimes. Our organization, the RDR, consistently urges all Rwandans to honor the memory of all the victims of the Rwandan tragedy, without exception, and to avoid exploiting, for political purposes, the ordeals that have created such sorrow for the Rwandan people and their families, as well as for all of humanity. Thus, we address this memorandum to you, as a call to all heads of state and government of the OAU countries, requesting you to undertake a major initiative to save peace in Rwanda, in order to prevent the total disintegration of our violence-torn country.

1. Understanding the Rwandan conflict

Wars against the population and genocides in violation of international law.

To date, Rwanda has lost 40% of its population through crimes against peace and against humanity, in a war declared against the population. As of July 1994, over half the population, i.e., nearly 4 million people, were either dead, displaced within the country, or refugees abroad. Figures released by the Census Bureau of the Interior Ministry of the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front] government show that, at the end of 1994, 2,101,250 people had died as victims. Estimates made in mid-1997 brought the figure up to 3,150,000 deaths, which include both victims of genocide—including refugees in Zaire—and of the many different massacres, such as in Kibeho in April 1995. This extermination policy has continued—meeting only silence from the international community, contrary to the Convention for Prevention and Repression of the Crime of Genocide of Dec. 9, 1948—since the peace agreement was broken subsequent to the RPF’s war of aggression against Rwanda launched from Ugandan territory on Oct. 1, 1990.

With support from the Ugandan authorities and with the personal complicity of President Museveni, then Chairman of the OAU, this war laid the basis for a dramatic chain-reaction of unprecedented violence. Crimes against peace and against humanity were committed, and impunity was institutionalized, in defiance of international law. Thus, both the UN Charter signed on June 26, 1945 in San Francisco, and the OAU Charter of May 25, 1963, have been trampled on since 1990. As you know, these Charters demand equal sovereignty for states and non-intervention into the internal affairs of member-states, and unreservedly condemn subversive activities on the territory of sovereign neighbor states. Ugandan support for the RPF war of aggression in Rwanda was in breach of the OAU Convention of Sept. 10, 1969, concerning specific aspects of the refugee problem. This Convention clearly calls on member-states to “forbid refugees residing in their respective territories from attacking an OAU member-state with use of arms, or media methods likely to create tensions among member-states.” According to Clause 102 of the United Nations Charter, these African Conventions are an integral part of the international law so flouted. The Rwandan conflict, which has spread into all of the Central African region, is thus outside of international law.

Today, overwhelming evidence is increasingly being turned up, proving how treacherously the RPF army tried to cover up its responsibility in the genocide of April 1994. The evidence particularly concerns the shooting down on April 6, 1994, of President Habyarimana’s plane, which was also

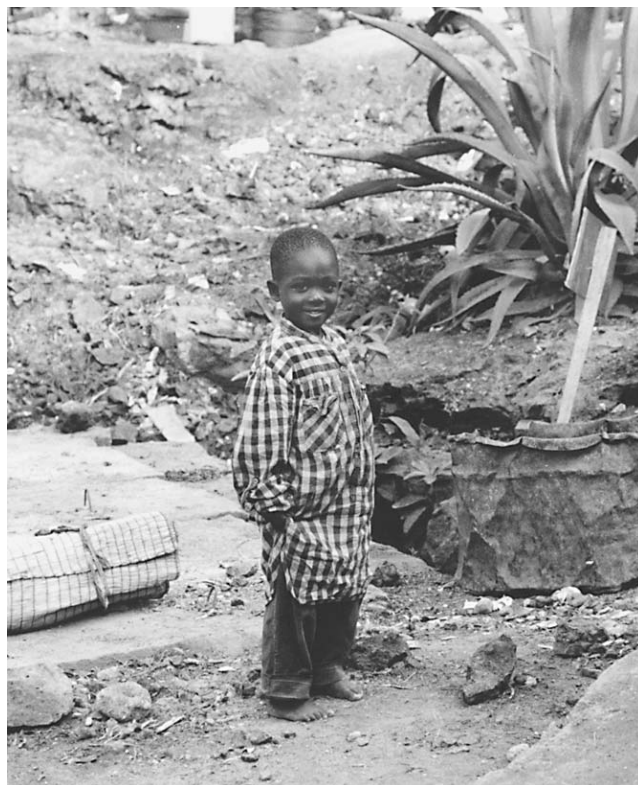
carrying his Burundian counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira, as well as their closest aides and the French crew. Available reliable testimony points to the RPF and their accomplices as having planned and carried out the attack, in defiance of the peace agreement signed in Arusha on Aug. 4, 1993. In the opinion of the UN Commission on Rwanda, in Report S/1994/1405 of Dec. 9, 1994, this attack “sparked off serious, premeditated violations of human rights, including systematic, generalized, blatant violations of humanitarian international law, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide.” It is outrageous that this genocide be shamelessly exploited by the very RPF regime that is largely to blame for setting it off.

A strategy for taking power carried to extremes.

We recall that in 1990, the problem of Rwandan refugees was in the process of being solved. The UN High Commission for Refugees and the OAU General Secretariat, who took part in the relevant negotiations, are privileged witnesses to this undeniable historical fact. Ex-Ugandan Prime Minister E. Kategaya stated on Oct. 3, 1990, before the Ugandan Parliament, that his government “had worked together with the Rwandese government to find a political solution for the large population of Rwandese refugees, and that the last meeting, held in Kigali during July 27-31, had led to promising paths toward a solution.” So it is permitted to deny the legitimacy of the October 1990 war, which the media attempt to portray as a war of refugees fighting for their legitimate, inalienable right to return to their country. This war against the Rwandan people was rather conceived of as a strategy for taking power by stirring up extremism.

Apologists for the Kigali regime continue to impose upon public opinion the Manichean view that the RPF is the “nice liberator” that went to war to stop genocide. To spread this lie, paranoia is even allowed to take precedence over facts, and inordinate importance is given to certain isolated elements that are systematically deformed. In this way, the 1994 genocide gave the RPF unlimited credit, or a blank check, with which they can justify all past and present atrocities for which they carry obvious political and criminal blame. This is also true with respect to the genocide of Rwandan and Burundian refugees in ex-Zaire. International and Congolese human rights organizations possess proof of the genocide. In a report dated April 2, 1997, (E/CN.4/1997/6/add.2), the High Commissioner’s special envoy on Human Rights, Roberto Garreton of Chile, spoke of crimes of “collective privation of life.” This is an understatement for what must be called “genocide,” according to the terms of the Convention for the Prevention and the Repression of the Crime of Genocide of Dec. 9, 1948. Mr. Garreton mentions over 50 precise places in his report and lists the facts about this genocide, which was characterized by “premeditated massacres, dispersal of refugees toward inhospitable areas, systematic blocking of humanitarian aid,” etc.

In July 1997, a UN mission, including Mrs. Bacré Wanly Ndiaye from Senegal and Jonas Foli from Ghana, respec-



A Rwandan refugee in Goma, Zaire, 1994. The Rally for the Return of Democracy and Refugees charges: “Under the cloak of banalizing war and genocide, the Rwandan Patriotic Front is escalating its war against the population, with a view to eliminating any potential opposition to its ethno-fascist regime.”

tively, rapporteur for summary executions, and expert on forced disappearances, in addition to Roberto Garreton, examined over 100 cases of massacres, torture, rape, plundering, and serious violations of human rights. All these violations, according to the experts, had “a systematic character, as products of prior preparation.” We know that nighttime flights of armored C-130 gunships, armed with rocket cannons, raked refugee camps, killing thousands of innocent people. These crimes were admitted to by General Kagame in an interview with the *Washington Post* of July 9, 1997, where he claimed credit for Mr. Kabila’s victory. Arrogantly presenting Mr. Kabila as a pawn, Kagame claimed he had planned, well before October 1996, the AFDL [Kabila’s] forces’ military offensive and then put it into effect. Given the triple objective of dismantling the Hutu refugee camps, destroying the structure of the militias and overthrowing Mobutu, the AFDL forces “were not able to do it alone.” On the same occasion, Kagame announced that the United States had taken “the wise decision of letting him act.” So, there can be no doubt that the AFDL and the RPA [Rwandan Patriotic Army] coldly implemented a deliberate strategy of exterminating Rwandan and Burundian refugees, and the international community knew it. Although the United Nations team investigating mas-

sacres of refugees in ex-Zaire is blocked by the Kinshasa regime and has not been able to conclude its report, the facts are there and the genocide has been documented in ample eyewitness accounts.

A moral systemic crisis, more a political than an ethnic problem.

General Kagame, RPF president, Rwandan Vice President, Defense Minister, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and, because of these several positions, the true “strongman of Rwanda,” described these genocidal “events” as a “wind of change,” when he was invited to the European Parliament in mid-January 1998. The loss of so many human lives, he said, was “the price to pay for eradicating the evils that deprived our societies of a positive direction.” This triumphalist perception only shows his inability to understand the tragedy which has changed the future and the history of our country, of Africa and of all of humanity. By approving the genocide of a people in this way, Kagame banalizes the absurdities of a total war against a people. He finds an odious justification and sublimates the suffering of an entire people by building it up into a cardinal virtue. A nation has been destroyed, communities have disappeared, and Kagame dismisses this permanent loss for humanity, as part of “positive direction.”

Our organization knows that, under the cloak of banalizing war and genocide, the RPF is escalating its war against the population, with a view to eliminating any potential opposition to its ethno-fascist regime. This has led to large-scale massacres, political assassinations and “disappearances,” especially of those refugees recently forced back to Rwanda, who were persecuted and deported in “death convoys,” in violation of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. All types of deprivations go on in the prison death-houses, overpopulated by 130,000 inmates who are crammed in, four per square meter, and of whom only one-third have even been booked with a record of charges. Many of these prisoners stay and die in jail simply because their property has been seized by members of the RPF, the RPA, its Abakada militia, or protégés of the regime. Many of those who survived the genocide and the massacres, just because they did manage to survive, are humiliated and slandered as being close to dignitaries of the old regime, and accused of trying to appear harmless.

Specialists of our country’s history and the majority of the Rwandan people know that the Inkotanyis, the name deliberately chosen by the RPF to attack Rwanda, were an infamous militia whose history goes back to the 19th century. This militia, well known for their atrocities and vandalism, helped consolidate a reign of over 40 years of violence, between 1850 and 1895, within the country and against neighboring countries. Then King Rwabugiri undertook several military campaigns as wars of aggression against Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Congolese province of Kivu, and at the same time put down popular uprisings within Rwanda.

Analysis of the major conflicts in Rwanda’s history leads one to state, without the slightest doubt, that all the tensions in Rwanda are of a political nature, whereas the problem of ethnic groups is only secondary, but an aspect which is often made use of in furthering the fundamental problem: a just, fair sharing of political, economic, and cultural power, as well as social justice. This analysis is valid for what happened during the famous social revolution of 1959, as well as for today.

History, and perhaps the International Court for Rwanda in Arusha, will establish the accuracy of this important fact, doing justice to the entire Rwandan people, whose different ethnic groups have been the victims of a collective guilt campaign by perfidious manipulations of public opinion. Indeed, if the Rwandan conflict is fundamentally ethnic in nature, how can it be explained that the president of the infamous Interahamwe, Robert Kajuga, was one of the hundreds of young Tutsis belonging to this militia, whereas the president of the RPF, Alexis Kanyarengwe, and many of his collaborators, including the current President of the Republic, Pastor Bizimungu, are Hutus? Similarly, the campaign of collective slander against all “ex-dignitaries of the Habyarimana regime,” of whom many are in the present RPF-dominated government, is unfounded and serves a perfidious purpose.

However, a certain racist, fascist ideology continues to see the ethnic factor as the underlying element of the Rwandan problem, presenting Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas as animal species, separate from the rest of humanity, born and genetically predestined to destroy one another. This is a revisionist attempt to revive racism and the ideology of “inequality of the races.” Thus, in the far-right circles, there is a comeback of ideas opposed to human progress of the black people, that deny them the capacity to think and to be rational. The advocates of Hegel and various other Arthur Gobineaus speak once again of an “ahistorical” Africa, a “total prisoner of the natural spirit,” unable to advance and develop. This is not very far from the roots of Nazism, which justified the extermination of the Jews by claiming outright that “the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, really represents an inferior type of human nature.”

According to an account published in the newspaper *The Shariat*, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni reportedly gave away the secret of what is happening in Central Africa, when he stated, on April 4, 1997, that: “[his] mission is to see Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire become federal states under one nation. . . . As Hitler did to bring together Germany, we should also do it here. Hitler was a smart guy. . . .” We have good reason to believe that the RPF is deeply motivated by this kind of ideology. Exalted by their militaro-fascist power, the RPF criminally takes advantage of the apathy of an international community, which is paralyzed by guilt because of its failure to assist people endangered by the genocide. This is, in turn,

exploited by the RPF in order to export their strategy of war to other African nations. They plan to upset the geostrategic realities in Central and Eastern Africa, and beyond. The Secretary General of this Front, Denis Polisi, stated on June 15 in Brussels, that "Rwanda has become a centerpiece in the region" and that "nothing will be done without going through" the RPF. He added that "Rwanda has just solved the problem of Zaire and is getting ready to solve others in the region." What hegemonist arrogance!

2. Glimmers of hope persist

It may be safely stated that, until October 1990, ethnic groups were starting to be significant only with respect to socio-ethnic tradition and family accounts. Following the democratic process sparked by the 1989 collapse of the communist system, a great majority of the Rwandan people started to opt for human rationality. A certain mobilizing faction wanted to replace the violent ethnic-based policy by a process of dialogue within a pluralist, democratic society. This faction held that the ethnic issue is not synonymous with backwardness, anarchy, or withdrawal into one's identity. Examples such as Scotland or Catalonia can serve as models to prove that ethnicity does not necessarily feed into disunion. Just as with other African ethnic groups, spread out over several countries and across border areas, it was excluded that our people should consider the Rwandan nation in terms of ethnic criteria. The countless interethnic marriages in Rwanda give ample proof to this fact, so often deformed by propaganda in the media. In spite of the intense violence wreaked upon them, the majority of the Rwandan people continue to reject the creation of a "Hutuland" or a "Tutsiland" in Rwanda; these concepts are indeed similar to apartheid, a crime against humanity, against which our people will fight with determination to save their integrity. This majority of the Rwandan people want reconciliation in order to build a pluralist society of solidarity, of sovereign, free men and women, which maintains constructive, friendly relations with the regional and international community.

Our organization, the RDR, which is among the best representatives of those holding this opinion, asserts that a nation is characterized not by ethnic groups or languages, but by a community of ideas, interests, affections, memories and hopes. We think it is criminal to revive a kind of Hitlerian "pan-Germanism," which would "measure the skulls of people" and then tell them "you have our blood, you belong to us." We share and respect the spirit and the letter of the OAU Charter and the African Human Rights and Peoples' Charter which were adopted by the different legislative bodies of our country. Taking inspiration from the Universal Human Rights Declaration, these charters hallow the principle of the sovereignty of peoples and citizens, including their inalienable right to only obey a government democratically elected by the people, which is our ultimate demand.

3. Acting to save peace in Rwanda

We hope the OAU will answer our urgent appeal to support our efforts, as regards this existential challenge for our people and for all of humanity, which is a disgrace for Africa. We say that propaganda will not solve the Rwandan conflict. The solution can only be based on the truth about everything that contributed to igniting this conflict. The causes and effects of the Rwandan tragedy are better understood by analyzing the entire complex network of causes and effects linked to the breakup of peace through the war of aggression against Rwanda undertaken from Uganda in October 1990. It is the aggressor who has taken power in Rwanda, not with the ballot boxes, but by force of arms. This aggressor has lost all credibility since the attack that claimed the lives of Rwandan President Habyarimana and Burundian President Ntaryamira, on the evening of June 4, 1994, triggering genocide and a chain-reaction of deadly violence, for which he carries enormous blame.

The international community in general and UN and OAU member countries in particular, who failed to meet their obligations, including that of taking "measures necessary for maintaining and establishing international peace and security" in Rwanda and in our region, could still change their attitude and once again give hope to the Rwandan people and humanity. The Rwandan people will thank you for your contribution to the search for a lasting political solution, guaranteeing the rule of law, the truth about the Rwandan tragedy, justice and democracy, which are the bases for true reconciliation and lasting peace and development in Rwanda. Concretely, we request you to use your powers of Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, so that the following goals might be met during this next term:

1. Rwanda be put back on, and kept on, the list of countries managed by the OAU's Central Mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution;
2. Genocide and massacres of the Rwandan people be permanently stopped;
3. Unreserved condemnation of the genocide against Rwandan and Burundian refugees in Congo ex-Zaire;
4. Maintaining and increasing effective, urgent humanitarian efforts for survivors of the genocide and massacres in Rwanda;
5. Protecting, aiding, and not expelling Rwandan refugees seeking exile in various African countries;
6. Diplomatic support for a political settlement of the conflict and mediation towards the opening of negotiations between the RPF-dominated Rwandan government and different opposition groups, in view of restoring constitutional legality and democratic institutions in Rwanda.

With our deepest gratitude for your intervention to save peace in Rwanda, we extend to you, Mr. President, our respect.