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Paul Rusesabagina

Founder and President

January 26, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500-0001

Subject: Humanitarian Catastrophe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dear Mr. President:

Please allow me, as an African brother, to congratulate you on your historic inauguration last week as the 44th President of the United States of America and the leader of the free world.

It was particularly uplifting to hear you declare your deep compassion for the people of poor nations, pledging "to work alongside them to make their farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds". My foundation, the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation, is at the forefront of this fight, especially in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Unfortunately, incessant wars make it a very challenging mission.

That is why I am humbly compelled to submit to you the following for your urgent and most needed intervention. You are now in a unique position to stave off the next chapter of a looming humanitarian catastrophe in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

1. Last week, a reported 3,000 Tutsi RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) troops crossed into the DRC to start a military campaign with the public purpose of forcefully disarming Hutu rebels of the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda). This comes under a purported peace deal between Rwanda, the DRC and the remaining factions of the CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People) Tutsi rebel movement based in eastern Congo, which is supported by the Rwandan government. In fact, this is merely the latest step in the conflict between Hutu and Tutsi elites going on since before Rwanda's independence in 1962, and which led to the genocide in 1994.
2. Friday's arrest of Laurent Nkunda, indicted war criminal and the notorious leader of the rebel CNDP group in the Congo, was good news for people in the Congo and the world. Problematically, some see this as the end of the conflict in the Congo. In fact, it is simply another move on the chess board by the Rwandan government, who apparently have arrested their former ally when his actions became too embarrassing and brought unwanted international attention to the crisis. Nkunda's arrest absolutely does not end this crisis. In fact, if the Rwandan government has its way this may now turn international attention away from the area just as the Rwandan army, aided by the Congolese, are engaging in another mass attack on Hutu refugees.

3. While there are certainly some armed rebels among the Hutus in eastern Congo, including some who should be tried for their roles in the 1994 genocide, most of the people in the region are innocent refugees. They fled to the Congo during the genocide in 1994, and since then have been joined by those fleeing from Paul Kagame's Tutsi-elite government in Rwanda. These refugees rightfully fear for their safety if they return home, but are now merely political pawns in eastern Congo. **And now these innocents are about to be attacked by the combined might of the Rwandan and Congolese forces.** The well armed militias may be the "official" targets, but an enormous number of innocent people will be caught in the middle. And the deaths of these innocents will NOT be an accident.
4. International reports are clear that most militia members currently in the region were not even alive, or were at most children during the genocide in 1994. Unfortunately, given the ongoing political situation in Rwanda, many have since joined the militia as their only hope for a better life. According to the Rwandan government, only Tutsis count as "survivors" of the genocide, even though countless Hutus were also victims in the conflict. Thus if you have two Hutu parents, you cannot receive an education or any other benefits in Rwanda. Combined with other government policies, such as the recent change in official language from French to English, anyone with a Hutu background is an estranged minority at best in Rwanda today.
5. According to a BBC News report on January 21, 2009, "The UN and aid agencies have raised concerns about the threat posed to civilians on the ground" by this military escalation. BBC News also reported that the UN mission in the country (MONUC) peacekeepers and aid workers have been barred by Congolese troops from entering war zones. This is disturbingly reminiscent of a similar operation in 1995 at the Kibeho camp of internally displaced people inside Rwanda, where the RPF Rwandan army butchered more than 4,000 innocent people with UN forces barred from intervening.
6. Your swift executive action and call for peace will carry enormous weight as one of the early major decisions of your Presidency. It can stop the fateful march to confrontation **and have an immediate impact in preventing the death of thousands, perhaps millions**, of innocent Congolese civilians caught in the cross-fire of the two battling armies.
7. Sweden and the Netherlands, two of the four largest sources of foreign aid for Rwanda, have already taken action by cutting off their aid in response to this crisis. There have also been calls for additional international troops to support MONUC, from countries who can actually be *neutral* and help the innocent civilians in the area. The United States can take a new and highly effective leadership role by supporting these efforts, along with placing pressure on the Rwandan regime.
8. You probably already know that unending wars in the DRC in the last decade have claimed the lives of more than 5 million people, the most in any conflict since WWII. **You probably also know that armed violence in the whole Great Lakes region of Africa started in 1990 when current Rwandan President General Paul Kagame made his debut on the international political scene with his RPF rebel army invasion of Rwanda from Uganda.** Since then, close to an estimated 10 million people in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, including 4 Presidents, have been killed as an immediate result of this armed violence. With United States leadership, this insanity can be brought to a peaceful and democratic end. Without it, innocents and combatants will continue to die.

9. Finally, Mr. President, I would like to pledge to you my unconditional allegiance in this fight for peace, especially in the Great Lakes region of Africa. You may already know that I am actively striving to garner support for an internationally instituted TRC – a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Rwanda. While the Rwandan government shows the world museums and claims that the effects of the 1994 genocide are in the past, this is most certainly not the case. While the Rwandan government trumpets an economic miracle, this is not shared by the vast majority of the Rwandan people. Genocide occurred in 1994, along with significant war crimes on both sides of the conflict. The creation of a fair, internationally sanctioned TRC, to investigate **ALL** sides and bring out the truth, is essential for Rwanda and the Great Lakes region to move forward. Without this, there will never be peace, justice and genuine reconciliation among Rwandans. There will also be no peace for the Congo or in the region.

I am aware of your heavy schedule and the enormous challenges awaiting you as leader of this great country, but at your earliest convenience it would be an immense pleasure and privilege to share with you in person the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation's initiative for peace and justice.

Mr. President, our brothers and sisters are being massacred unnecessarily in Central Africa and I, for one, cannot remain indifferent.

Please allow me again to pay a vibrant tribute to your historic inauguration as President of the United States of America. May God bless you ever more.

Most respectfully yours,



Paul Rusesabagina
Founder and President
Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation

CC:

- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon
- Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council (All)
- US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
- US Majority Leader of the Senate Harry Reid
- US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton
- US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice
- UN Special Envoy in the Great Lakes Region Olusegun Obasanjo
- EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso
- AU Commission President Jean Ping