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Rwandan Government Makes False Accusation, Again

Today the Rwandan government made another false accusation against Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation founder and president Paul Rusesabagina. This time, according to the government sponsored *New Times* newspaper, Rusesabagina is alleged to be a “top financier” to the FDLR, the Hutu rebel group based out of the Congo. This assertion is patently false.

Today’s pronouncement adds to past slander and libelous comments made by the newspaper, Rwandan government officials, and Rwandan agents in the U.S. and Europe. If the Rwandan government is to be believed, Paul Rusesabagina once sent hundreds of dollars to rebel groups. And late last year, he allegedly sent thousands to a new “terrorist” group in the Congo. And now he is a “top financier” for the FDLR. Let’s not also forget that in 2007, Rwanda’s Ambassador to the United States, James Kimonyo, accused Rusesabagina and two highly respected former U.S. Ambassadors (Robert Krueger and Robert Flaten) of meeting in South Africa to raise money in order to run guns to rebel groups. All of these accusations are completely false, and are a clear and graceless attempt by the Rwandan government to defame Paul Rusesabagina, along with any other critic of the authoritarian regime.

Paul Rusesabagina is a humanitarian, working to help the Rwandan people and everyone in the Great Lakes Region of Africa by bringing out the truth about the authoritarian policies of the Rwandan government. These policies lead to human rights abuses and extreme political repression in Rwanda, harming the vast majority of the Rwandan people in order to benefit a small minority in the ruling elite. As reported by the United Nations and many human rights organizations, these same policies also perpetuate conflict in the neighboring Congo, leading to the deaths of more than six million people. All to profit this same minority regime.

The continuing and increasingly awkward campaign by the Rwandan government to vilify its many critics in the Rwandan diaspora, as well as in the international community, is now growing increasingly transparent as more of the truth comes to light. When the only response from an authoritarian government is to attack those who point out its offenses, then that government must be on the decline.

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The recent article in the *New Times* quotes unnamed sources in the “Diaspora community” in the U.S. There are indeed over a million Rwandans living outside of their native country. Rusesabagina is only one of the voices in that vast community, which includes a thriving civil society made up of exiles. Almost all of those are Rwandans who cannot return to their place of birth for fear of their lives and livelihoods, knowing that repression awaits, or worse for anyone who speaks out against the government.

The diasporans quoted in this story in the government controlled newspaper, if they even exist, are among the tiny percentage who are living abroad and supported by the Rwandan government. They include primarily students and recent former students with paid scholarships, who are paid in part to spread the government’s careful campaign of information control. They attend events by exiles and ex-patriots that are critical of the government that pays them and report back on these. They write the same critiques on websites over and over, reading from the same government written script. And they know that on their return to Rwanda, they will be a valued part of the small elite that controls that country. These individuals do not in any way represent the enormous exile community.

Unfortunately, these paragraphs have been a discussion of false accusations, which is exactly what the Rwandan government wants. What they don’t want is to discuss the elections last August, where Paul Kagame once again “won” the presidency with 93% of the vote in an election that was a complete sham. All serious opposition was outlawed, with their leaders harrassed and arrested. And even the United States government, often an ally of Kagame, did not officially congratulate him on his “victory.” Kagame does not want the world to discuss the 2010 Mapping Report on the Congo, where his government is accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly even genocide against Hutus in that country. He does not want us to discuss a complete lack of press freedom in Rwanda, including the jailing and killing of journalists. And he does not want us to discuss Victoire Ingabire, and opposition candidate still in a Rwandan jail, or Peter Erlinder, her American lawyer who was falsely imprisoned when he arrived in Rwanda to defend his client. These are just the tip of the iceberg on the problems facing the Rwandan government.

The Rwandan people need more. They need a government that will work to help all of them, not to impoverish the majority while enriching the small leadership group. And they need leadership that focuses on the reality of Rwanda and plans for a better future, instead of denying any problems and heaping blame on its critics. That’s what the real Rwandan diaspora, and the people of Rwanda, really want.

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