

# PROCLAMATION ESTABLISHING THE RWANDA NATIONAL CONGRESS

We, the Citizens of Rwanda who are signatories to this Proclamation, met in Bethesda, Maryland, in the United States of America on 11 - 12 December 2010, to discuss strategies for resolving the explosive political impasse that prevails in Rwanda and to envision a new nation embedded in human dignity, mutual respect, freedom, liberty, justice, and democracy.

We firmly believe that all human beings have an inherent right to live in peace and freedom and to the fair use of, and access to, the resources with which their nations are endowed for the promotion of the well-being of all citizens.. Every person is entitled to the rights promulgated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, and other international conventions and instruments that explicitly establish and protect the full range of universal human rights. The principal rationale for the existence of government is to facilitate the realization of these fundamental and inalienable rights for all citizens.

Rwanda is an ancient nation. No doubt, every government that has exercised control over the Rwandan state during the course of our country's long history can rightfully be credited for developments that have been of benefit to its citizens. On balance, however, virtually every Rwandan government has historically preyed on the citizenry and has suppressed the realization and enjoyment of the inherent and universal rights of those whom it governed.

Autocratic government (in the form of a government controlled by an absolute monarch or an all-powerful president) has generally been the norm during our history. While Rwanda is a diverse society, the diversity of its national character (based on class, ethnic identity, religion or region of origin) has often been manipulated by elite political leaders to satisfy their selfish and egoistic interests and to acquire or monopolize power and access to resources. Our people have never had the opportunity to fully realize their aspirations for freedom, security and prosperity.

During its long history, Rwanda have never been provided with a political environment wherein all of its citizens, regardless of their beliefs or origins, were able to exercise their inherent rights. Instead, every group that has assumed power - though at first proclaiming universal and democratic ideals - has in time succumbed to the lure of the monopoly of power.

Each ruling group eventually found justification to exclude the majority of Rwandans from the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. The ruling class often assumed absolute power and governed with impunity, outside the rule of law and outside universally recognized democratic norms; it prepared to eliminate both real and perceived political opponents and competitors for the privileges that flow from control of political power.

For ordinary Rwandans, they were rarely, if ever, entitled to their inherent human rights and the right of expression of beliefs and free association. In the past, and sadly to this day, political leaders determined who should live or who should die, outside the rule of law. The struggle in Rwanda of competition for power and access to resources has often unleashed cataclysmic conflict, killings and untold human suffering, particularly over the last five decades. Horrendous violence, including crimes against humanity and genocide, has in the past been unleashed against innocent men, women and children caught in the crossfire of elites struggling for political supremacy.

Upon assuming power at the end of the genocide in 1994, the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), the party that governs Rwanda today, promised to reverse the violent history of the past; it promised to overturn a political culture of violence, unaccountable government, and exclusion and marginalization of the majority of the population. Regrettably, Rwanda is now far less free than it was prior to just before the genocide.

The RPF has established a political system that maintains a false appearance of multi-party democracy but does not provide real opportunity for political dialogue or competition. Rwanda's laws make it impossible for individuals and organizations other than the RPF to participate meaningfully in politics and to build the nation on behalf of all Rwandans. Rwandans do not have opportunities for meaningful political participation and cannot exercise their fundamental right to choose and change government. Instead, while Rwanda holds regular elections, their outcomes are pre-determined.

Rwanda's political system does not provide opportunity for checks and balances. The entire machinery of government is controlled by the Head of State. The legislature, virtually all of whose members belong to the ruling party, is a rubber stamp for the executive and complies with its every demand. Further, the judiciary lacks independence, Economic, social and political power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of officials answerable only to the President, who control all institutions of the state from behind the scenes. In sum, the Rwandan Government is not accountable to the people of Rwanda.

The RP maintains its monopoly of political power by means of repressive laws, unfair and illegal administrative practices, fear, intimidation and violence. Administrative,

law enforcement, judicial and security institutions are used to suppress the exercise of fundamental human rights of citizens who are not members of the RPF. Draconian restrictions limit the ability of civil society, including the media, to hold government accountable. The government uses the security services to persecute opponents and critics of the government. Elements of the security services regularly resort to issuing false charges, illegal detentions, politically-motivated prosecutions, imprisonment of opponents, enforced disappearances, and extra-judicial killings and other forms of violence to maintain the RPF's monopoly of power.

Rwanda's poor record of governance enhances social polarization, stemming from cleavages driven by perception of marginalization and exclusion based on class, ethnicity, region, language and origin. The government's failures result in widespread and increasing poverty, especially among the rural population, and perpetual conflict. Rwanda also suffers an endemic problem of refugees. It has grappled with armed insurgency by groups based in the Democratic Republic of Congo that the government has not been able to defeat.

President Paul Kagame justifies these draconian restrictions on the exercise of civil and political rights on the grounds that the restrictions are necessary to prevent manipulation of ethnicity and recurrence of genocide. As a result of these restrictions and violations of universal rights and liberties, Rwanda's government lacks popular legitimacy. This failure of legitimacy on the part of the government presents grave implications for peace and stability.

In spite of the traumatic experiences that Rwandans have experienced and continue to endure, they share common aspirations to live in peace, free from fear of becoming victims of power struggles among competing elites. Rwandans are eager to work to meet their own needs and to become self-sufficient. They long to live in a nation whose growth is focused on ensuring that every individual, family and community has equal access to the full range of human rights, including access to health, education, work or land for farming. Our people yearn to live in freedom, in a state that honors and respects their inherent rights to human dignity, human rights and the right to determine their own future in freedom and security.

Rwanda's recovery from the ravages of war and genocide has been remarkable, but is evidently not sustainable. Freedom, peace and economic and social development are intimately linked. Freedom is the ultimate expression of human dignity and equality. Freedom is essential for human happiness and well-being.

But until today, the absence of freedom is the most critical obstacle to the achievement of our people's dreams and aspirations.

As a direct result of the current government's intransigent refusal to embrace democracy and respect of our people's fundamental and inalienable rights, the threat of violent conflict and bloodshed again looms large over our motherland. Rwanda

needs profound political reform to avert the risk of violent conflict - conflict that could be of the same or worse catastrophic proportions as the war and genocide of the 1990s - and to ensure peace and sustainable development. We are convinced that only profound change, rooted in popular aspiration for freedom, peace and mutual material well-being can avert the looming crisis.

We, the signatories of this Proclamation, share deeply-held convictions that the policies of the current Rwandan government may, in the long- term, lead to violent conflict and bloodshed. We are determined to work together with likeminded Rwandans to avert this impending calamity and chart a new course that will ensure sustainable peace for all our people. We believe that fundamental political change is a pre-requisite for building and sustaining peace in Rwanda. We are determined to work together and bring an end to dictatorship; we will together usher in a new era of freedom, unity, democracy and the rule of law.

The present government, instead of working to address the issues that so severely threaten the very survival of the nation, adamantly refuses to acknowledge the need for political reform. We have, consequently, resolved to establish, and hereby proclaim, the establishment of the Rwanda National Congress to spearhead a national peaceful struggle to end the current dictatorship, establish democracy and ensure sustainable peace for all Rwandans. We envision a new Rwanda infused with freedom, unity, peace and prosperity for all, without discrimination. The Rwanda National Congress is not a political party. It is an umbrella, broad-based organization for all Rwandans to exert pressure and advocate for democratic change through peaceful means.

We envision a new Rwanda that will be a united, democratic, and prosperous nation inhabited by free citizens with harmonious and safe communities who will live together in peace, dignity and mutual respect, regardless of class, ethnicity, language, region, origin or other differences, within a democracy governed according to universal principles of human rights and the rule of law.

The political-and societal- transformation we seek to bring about in Rwanda can only be achieved if it is rooted in values that are both relevant to our people's cultural heritage and reflect the aspirations of the majority of Rwandans at this time in history. These values, which shall be the foundation of our nation-rebuilding process, include human dignity and respect for human rights, equality and non-discrimination, mutual respect, democracy and the rule of law, integrity, empathy, solidarity, patriotism, humility, forgiveness, the right and responsibility of citizens to hold leaders accountable, accountable leadership, truth, justice, fairness.

The objectives of our cause are to:

1. Stop and prevent violent conflict, including genocide and grave human rights violations that Rwanda's people have periodically suffered and that have historically extended to citizens - men, women, and children - of neighboring states;
2. Eradicate a culture of impunity for human rights violations;
3. Create a conducive and progressive environment for inclusive social and economic development for all the people of Rwanda;
4. Establish, nurture institutionalize democratic governance, particularly the rule of law in all its aspects;
5. Establish independent, non-partisan, professional civil service and security institutions;
6. Build a stable society that promotes and protects equality, embraces and celebrates diversity, and fosters inclusion in all aspects of national
7. Promote individual, community and national reconciliation and healing;
8. Promote harmonious relations, reconciliation and mutually- beneficial collaboration with the peoples and governments of neighboring states;
9. Resolve the chronic problem of Rwandan refugees;
10. Nurture a culture of tolerance to diverse ideas, freedom of discussion, and debate of critical issues.

We promulgate this Proclamation in the earnest hope that it will encourage all Rwandans of good will to overcome fear and mistrust, and to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of the ideals, values, principles and goals that this Proclamation embodies. We view this Declaration as a living document that will evolve over time. We believe this Proclamation must reflect the collective will of all Rwandans who, like us, envision a peaceful, democratic, and free nation for themselves and for posterity.

We, the founders of the Rwanda National Congress gathered at Bethesda, Maryland, in the United States of America, representing a wide diversity of our nation, do hereby adopt this Proclamation this 12<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2010.