

ROAD MAP FOR A PROMISING FUTURE OF RWANDA

A proposal on how to reform current governance, so it responds to today's reality in Rwanda.

Jointly written by Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza & Maître Ntaganda Bernard

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I. Introduction

Since mid 1950's the people of Rwanda have experienced repeated hardship due to leadership that wanted to access and stay on power by all means.

One of the worst consequences, is that ordinary civilians have suffered from abhorrent massacres, grave violations of human rights, war crimes and, in 1994, a genocide that targeted the Tutsi population. Countless political elites have been assassinated.

At every violent episode of political struggle, innumerable Rwandans fled their country such as in 1959 after the "social" revolution, as well as in 1994, after the "liberation" war.

Every political transition in Rwanda has been characterised by violent removal from power of a group of Rwandans by another group of Rwandans. The involvement of the international community into these repeated political turmoil in Rwanda is irrefutable and in most of cases it has intervened when the worse has already taken place.

We would like to draw the attention of the Rwandan government and the international community that existential group grievances and systemic failures to address them could lead to another implosion in Rwanda and send in smoke the achievements made in Rwanda in the last 26 years with substantial financial support from abroad.

We believe that Rwandans should learn to accept their history, learn from their mistakes and build on the achievements of past regimes. We can build on what we did well and learn from what we failed on. Thereafter, we can chart a way forward on how we can safeguard accomplished developments and build on them to attain even greater achievements. In this way we would have transformed our tragic past into a better history which will inspire the younger generation of Rwandans.

The war that was started by the RPF was due to frustrations of a section of the Rwandan people who felt marginalised, denied their inalienable right of having a country they call home, and those who felt that their political and civil rights were not respected. This led to a four-year war and ended up in genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed.

It is critical that we start to prepare a promising future for the next generation of Rwandans from today. This is what the Road Map for a promising future of Rwanda proposes.

II. Motivations of the Road Map

After the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took power it held, from 1998 to 1999, national consultations – referred to as Urugwiro Village meetings – to discuss how Rwanda could solve its issues of national unity, democracy, justice, economy and security. The outcomes of these consultations are the guiding philosophies of the governance implemented by the RPF over the two decades it has been ruling Rwanda.

Among the RPF's achievements are the maintenance of security across Rwanda, the establishment of governing structures and the reformation of the legislation directing the state's activities.

Nonetheless, The consensual democracy enforced by RPF supposedly shaped on the basis of the context and norm of Rwanda with intent to overcome ethnic violence, has – with time- changed into a political system that suppresses political dissents, restricts political pluralism and civil liberty as well as abuses human rights and infringes rule of law.

The mechanisms to promote unity and reconciliation among Rwandans adopted by the consultation meetings were commendable. However, there is still conflicting views among Rwandans particularly when it comes to the memorial of victims of war crimes committed before, during and after the genocide against Tutsi.

From the national consultations of 1999 merged a great idea of a development programme that aimed to transform Rwanda into middle income state by 2020 driven by a knowledge economy – referred as Vision 2020. In spite of the financial support the Government of Rwanda received from development partners, it has not delivered Vision 2020 objectives. The COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing economic distress of Rwanda. This implies that in order to achieve sustainable development we all need to work together and even more harder than before.

Lastly, in the 20 years since the first series of Urugwiro Village meetings took place, the political scenery in Rwanda has transformed along the way. It is no longer made up of only the opposition that is affiliated to the ruling party, but also includes growing dissenting voices that are heard across Rwanda and beyond.

III. Road Map proposed solution

Against the aforementioned backdrop, we propose that another inter-Rwandan dialogue be convened – one that draws from the aforementioned challenges to discuss how to reform current governance, so it responds to today’s reality in Rwanda. The ultimate objective of the proposed dialogue must be to safeguard what has been achieved and build on it to bring about sustainable development in Rwanda.

Our proposed dialogue is in line with the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (*UN S/2020/1168*¹). The strategy points out that effective and sustained dialogue among citizens is crucial to fostering trust, addressing underlying grievances and facilitating collective action towards the common objective of peace, stability and prosperity. That is what the Road Map Project proposes we achieve in Rwanda through inter-Rwandan dialogue

The proposed inter Rwandan dialogue entails to engage Government and dissenting voices both within and outside the country in cooperative, constructive and positive discussions to define measures and how these can be implemented to reform our country governance so it is in line with today realities. These discussions should cover four main topics that are considered to be the root causes of instability in our country but if managed efficiently could restore good governance in Rwanda.

- Inclusive political processes.
- Reconciliation
- Rule of law and human rights.
- Sustainable development and shared prosperity.

1. Inclusive political processes

The consensual democracy enforced by RPF supposedly shaped on the basis of the context and norm of Rwanda with intent to overcome ethnic violence, has – with time-changed into a political system that suppresses political dissents, restricts political pluralism and civil liberty.

We believe that a democracy in which the rule of law does not discriminate against anyone and that offers equal opportunity to all, removes all conditions that can be exploited by extremists in their endeavours. It must be made clear that being opposed to and critical of government policies is not being an enemy of the country. It is obvious that people cannot share same views on the policies to bring about sustainable development

¹ https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_1168.pdf

in Rwanda. In fact, when well-managed, policies criticisms can trigger creativity in finding solutions to the development problems that Rwanda is facing.

To achieve the aforementioned, the current democracy concept has to change and a new consensus on that matter be reached with all key stakeholders through the proposed inter Rwandan dialogue. Given especially that the political scenery in Rwanda have changed over the past 27 years and includes dissenting voices today and will continue to evolve as time passes by, the democracy applied by Rwanda must be adjusted to respond to today realities.

The proposed dialogue could debate and agree on whether it is high time to have an all-inclusive political process that is open and allows free political competition in Rwanda. The current political system has all the signs of a one-party state system where one party dominates all the state structures including deciding on who should be allowed to compete with the ruling party in political elections or even should be registered as a political party.

2. National reconciliation

The mechanisms to promote unity and reconciliation among Rwandans adopted by the consultation meetings of 1999 were commendable. However, there is still tensions among Rwandans. These tensions emanate from the following:

- Rwanda's unfortunate past is differently perceived and thus remains divisive among Rwandans;
- Persisting ethnicity division among Rwandans due to unfortunate events that occurred in Rwanda;
- distrust among Rwandans whereby some are afraid that other want or will seek vengeance;
- Conflicting views on the memorial to the victims of war crimes committed in Rwanda before, during and after the genocide against Tutsi.

All of the aforementioned create social grievances and weakens trust and cooperation among our people.

To achieve genuine reconciliation, the proposed dialogue could debate on whether the following proposals worth considering.

- Transforming National Unity and Reconciliation Commission into a real independent body led by people who truly represent the different backgrounds of the Rwandans;

- Continuing the commemoration of the genocide against Tutsi and at the same time take actions and measures that enable Hutu that lost their loved ones in other committed massacres to feel included in the nation's remembrance.
- Transforming Rwanda's unfortunate past into a better and an inspiring history by implementing a form of amnesty on all crimes committed in Rwanda. For such an amnesty to be possible, Rwandans must to establish a common understanding on all crimes committed against them between early 1990's and 2000's.

3. Rule of law and human rights

Among the RPF's achievements is that the security has been maintained across Rwanda, governing structures have been established and the legislations directing state's activities have been reformed.

It is quite clear that these efforts have not reached expected results. The most obvious signals are:

- Many refugees have not returned despite government calls inviting them to come back home. Others are fleeing the country now.
- Prejudice among Rwandans whereby those opposing the policies or actions implemented by incumbent governing regime are quick branded as enemies of states.
- Scepticism between Rwandans living abroad and in Rwanda, as well as between opposition and the Government;
- The absence of culture of dialogue with those with divergent ideas ;
- Lack of human right respect;
- The absence of freedom of expression
- The absence of political participation

Security is not merely an absence of war but how the ordinary citizen lives without fear of security services. It depends on the level at which an ordinary citizen is satisfied with the enjoyment of his inalienable human rights. Over the past decades Rwanda has been alleged of human rights abuses by many of its development partners and international human rights organisation. It is important to remind that during the January 2021 Universal Periodic Review, Rwanda received 284 recommendations from 99 countries. It accepted 160 recommendations, noted 75². Further reports of human rights abuse or/and unjust judicial proceedings against dissenting voices in Rwanda will be damaging to our country's reputation and future development. It is high time to engage in constructive

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/01/un-countries-call-out-rwandas-rights-record>

debate on how respect of basic human rights and rule of law should be restored and make the political space inclusive in Rwanda.

4. Sustainable development and shared prosperity

From the national consultations of 1999 merged a great idea of a development programme that aimed to transform Rwanda into middle income state by 2020 driven by a knowledge economy – referred as Vision 2020. In spite of the financial support the Government of Rwanda received from development partners, it has not delivered Vision 2020 objectives. Our country remains a low-income state and among the poorest and least developed countries in the world.

In our view, the failure to deliver vision 2020 objectives was due to policies - such as educational, agricultural and land policies among others - meant to facilitate the vision delivery have been implemented without citizen participation and/or in a manner that lacked accountability and sensitivity towards them. While Rwanda as a small and land locked country faces a structural constraints to growth, the political tensions with our neighbouring countries that led to border's closure, have never enabled our country to overcome its structural limitations and take fully benefit from regional economic opportunity.

COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on our country economy which was not resilient as often portrayed. This has intensified economic stress among citizens and is raising question on whether the government's development plan to transform Rwanda into a middle income state by 2035 and high income by 2050 is realistic under current governance standard. Research has also shown that Prior to Covid-19, Rwanda had a cash gap of 15.7% of GDP per year to meet its sustainable development goals by 2030. This has increased to 21.3% of GDP³.

We believe that when the governance reforms, emanating from the proposed dialogue between the government and dissenting voices, would have been implemented, it will immediately reinforce Rwanda's brand as best place to do business in. In return this will enable more investment to flow in the country which will contribute toward bringing about sustainable development in Rwanda.

³ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/04/29/SDG-Financing-Options-in-Rwanda-A-Post-Pandemic-Assessment-50252>

IV. Road Map's stakeholders

To achieve its assigned goal, this Road Map must be implemented by all active actors who play a key role for a promising future of Rwanda.

The past history of Rwanda has shown governments and the international community have always tried to negotiate the problem of refugees without engaging refugees themselves. It has not worked. President Kayibanda called on Tutsi refugees to return but they did not do so because they were not very sure of their peaceful and harmonious reintegration in the social political and economic structures in the country. They were not even consulted. The agreement signed between the Rwandan and Ugandan government as well as UNHCR on the return of Rwandan refugees to Rwanda did not prevent the war to take place in October 1990.

Therefore this road map has established the following as the stakeholders in this project.

- Rwandan Government;
- Opposition and civil society organizations (comprising those operating inside Rwanda and in exile);
- The International community

1. Rwandan Government

Some changes are needed in order for this Road Map can be implemented. The Rwandan Government is recommended to:

- i. Engage with all stakeholders including political opposition and civil societies inside and outside the country;
- ii. Implement the 287 recommendations made in January 2021 UPR and at the minimum the 235 it acknowledged;
- iii. Ensure a conducive and safe environment for everyone exercising or seeking to exercise his or her rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association;
- iv. Open the political space to offer all citizens the right and opportunity without any distinctions and without unreasonable restrictions to freely form and register a political party and operate in a pluralistic political sphere;
- v. Enabling citizens living in Rwanda who are willing to start political parties in Rwanda to do so;
- vi. Ensure that no one is criminalized for exercising the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, nor is subject to threats or use of violence, harassment, persecution, intimidation or reprisals;

- vii. Release all those arrested because of the exercise of their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and ending labelling critics of the regime as enemies of the State;
- viii. Ensure political education on democracy and human rights;

2. Opposition and Civil organizations

Opposition political parties and civil organizations are vibrant actors to advance Rwanda toward a promising future. The experience shows that no country can sort out its numerous challenges without taking allowances for the role of those actors. Therefore, to implement this Road Map, opposition political parties and society civil organizations must be responsible in order to fulfil their demanding roles such as:

- i. Take part in charting a way for a bright future for Rwanda;
- ii. Avoid instrumentalization of ethnicity in the political debate;
- iii. Play the positive role of the opposition by focussing on constructive criticism and making the government accountable to the public;
- iv. Participate in political education on political pluralism and human rights;
- v. Help in sensitizing refugees to get involved in political dialogue;
- vi. Help rebuilt the social capital of our country.

3. The International Community

Undoubtedly, the international community has a major role to play for this Road Map to become a reality. It is not possible to stabilize the Great Lakes region without resolving the political, socio- economic grievances in Rwanda. This Road Map is in the line with the UN strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region.

It is in this context that the international community has to :

- i. Support all political actors and civil society organisations in their effort to bring all stakeholders together to chart a new vision of Rwanda;
- ii. Provide financial and logistical support to stakeholders where need arises.

V. Road Map implementation

For the proposed Road Map to be successful, it is necessary:

- To set up a commission - made of inclusive politicians, religious and members of civil society - that will thoroughly plan and implement the Road Map;
- To engage Rwandans across the country and abroad in the implementation of the Road Map;
- To prepare a budget for the Road Map.

VI. Anticipated results of the Road Map.

- Transforming Rwanda's unfortunate past into a better and an inspiring future;
- Planning a better inclusive future for younger generation of Rwandans;
- Bringing about genuine and sustainable unity and reconciliation among Rwandans;
- Guaranteeing durable security for Rwanda;
- Achieving sustainable development in Rwanda;
- Positioning Rwanda as an indisputably inventive country and indeed a model of reconciliation in the region and on the African continent.
- Changing the mind-set of Rwandans whereby they will be encouraged to direct their effort and creativity as well as know-how on how to bring about sustainable development in Rwanda;
- Encouraging the youth born and /or brought up abroad to return to Rwanda so they contribute towards making Rwanda a thriving country;
- Removing reasons to exercise political activities outside Rwanda and create armed insurgencies with intent to take over the power in Rwanda by force;
- All members of Rwanda diaspora wishing to return to Rwanda will freely do so without any fear for being ill-treated for their opinion among other;
- Making it possible for Rwandans interested into politics to do so by competing for power using ideals and applying peaceful and smart actions that safeguard and build on the development achieved.

VII. Timeline

The implementation of the proposed Road Map will be gradual through different actions and activities to be carried out throughout the remaining presidential term of incumbent president of Rwanda (i.e., during the next 3 years). Thus the incumbent president will leave the office with a legacy of having solved issues making Rwandan fleeing their country and fortified long term stability in Rwanda.

This is the only way to safeguard the current achievement that he has brought about in Rwanda during his presidency. Most importantly, he would have re-written a new history of Rwanda which would serve as inspirational and a foundation for the next generation of Rwanda, as they continue to work together toward making Rwanda secure and prosperous.

VIII. Conclusion

For this road map to become successful it requires a political will. Current leadership of Rwanda will have to forfeit a lot for the sake of the country and new generations of Rwandans in general.

To sum up, the success of this Road Map requires the total and full participation of all keys actors as mentioned above. Needless to say that the current Rwandan Government under Rwanda Patriotic Front INKOTANYI (RPF) is the major actor among them. It belongs to RPF INKOTANYI to think about its legacy since the implementation of this Road Map will be a corner stone for a promising future of Rwanda.