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Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations to Ben Gilman, July 24, 1995

US Embassy Rwanda

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Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations

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July 24, 1995

The Honorable Ben Gilman
Chairman, House International
Relations Committee
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Nowhere in the world are more people in danger of losing their lives to political and ethnic violence in the coming months than in the Central African countries of Rwanda and Burundi. We have ample warnings of impending conflict -- reports that militias are rearming, that armies are committing massacres, that populations are fleeing violence, and that food shortages are multiplying these tensions. We have examples of last year's genocide in Rwanda and the 1993 massacres in Burundi as consequences of failure to act.

We, the undersigned members of the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations, are deeply concerned that great numbers of innocent lives will be lost, again, because the United States and major states refuse to take swift and decisive action. AERDO member agencies represent a constituency of more than 20 million evangelical Christians throughout the U.S. who support our relief and development work throughout the world. Several AERDO member agencies are working among Rwandan refugees in neighboring states and internally displaced, providing for basic human needs such as food, water, shelter and health. AERDO joins other American humanitarian, human rights and foreign policy groups calling for implementation of emergency measures in the region.

This crisis is political in origin and can only be solved through political means. If the international community fails, humanitarian organizations will again be left to pick up the pieces, aided by a generous but increasingly exhausted public. Governments and international organizations have promised much since last year's genocide. Now is the time for them to deliver!

The genocide in Rwanda caught much of the world unawares, although plenty of warning was available, and it continued in full view for nearly three months. Now, Hutu extremists are rearming in exile, Tutsi extremists are gaining ground within Rwanda, and the international community has failed to provide the resources to rebuild the country and strengthen the moderates. In Burundi, where the ethnic composition resembles Rwanda, the assassination of the country's first democratically elected president, a Hutu, by Tutsi extremist army offices in October 1993, led to massacres of tens of thousands of both groups. As in Rwanda, the perpetrators of these killings enjoy total impunity, and the process of democratization and reform is continually undermined by violence.

Both countries are spiraling downward toward another catastrophe. Fragile reconstruction efforts were set back when government forces opened indiscriminate fire on a camp for displaced people at Kibeho, among whom were a small number of armed Hutu extremists. The majority of victims were innocent, unarmed, internally displaced people (IDPs) who had fled violence. Reports from Zaire indicate that forces that committed the genocide are preparing to re-invade the country. In Burundi, a cycle of indiscriminate attacks and reprisals by Hutu extremist militias and the Tutsi-dominated army is leaving a mounting death toll and destroying the fragile framework of political accommodation. The extremists of both groups have increased their cooperation across national boundaries. Hundreds of thousands more people could die in the coming months unless this cycle of violence and insecurity is stopped.

Only a coordinated regional approach that ends impunity, disarms and disempowers the extremists, creates security for proponents of justice and reconciliation, and enables refugees and the displaced to return home can stop this region's slide toward disaster. Therefore, the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Agencies urge the United States, the United Nations, and the world to urgently implement a set of policies -- many of them already promised -- to meet these goals. The cost will be cheap compared to the cost of failure -- a cost that will be measured not only in lives lost, investments destroyed, and vast funds squandered on relief for preventable disasters, but in our honor and humanity.

We recommend:

- * All donors should immediately release the more than \$600 million in funding that has already been pledged to Rwanda. The U.S. and France must assume international leadership to transform the "Rwanda Operation Support Group" into a consortium that will unblock the pledged funds and vigorously monitor well-defined timetables, effective judicial action, and implementation of the human rights guarantees. This donor group should develop a regional strategy and become a consortium for the entire Great Lakes region of Central Africa.
- * The President should ensure that a high-level special envoy is empowered to oversee the implementation of these recommendations. The U.S. must take the lead to see that international organizations work effectively and that our government and other major states collaborate fully.
- * The United Nations, in consultation with the Organization of African Unity, must expedite launching of a "Regional Consultative Mission," to be led by an eminent statesman and supported by a small team of experts familiar with recent peace, humanitarian and technical assistance operations in the region, that could shuttle for no more than 90 days among Central African capitals to help prepare a regional summit on security and cooperation by the end of 1995. Such a mission would be consistent with the Secretary General's intention, stated in his

most recent report to the Security Council on Rwanda, to appoint a regional special envoy and convene a regional conference. Developing a plan for collective action to control the flow of arms into the region, particularly the de-militarization of refugee and insurgent groups, must be a top priority for this regional summit. This summit should be supported by an additional conference, with full participation by local and international non-governmental organizations.

- * The UN should immediately deploy military observers at the airports and camps in eastern Zaire to curb the arms which are reportedly being supplied to exiled Rwandan genocidal forces. This action was recommended by UN Security Council Resolution 997, implementation of which was the goal of the recent trip to the region by Under Secretary General Aldo Ajello. In addition, we urge the following actions which could minimize the possibility of an invasion of Rwanda by genocidal forces in Zaire:
1. All states to share intelligence information on the rearming of extremists and the sources of arms and money;
 2. Full funding and support for the Rwandan War Crimes Tribunal, including swift arrest and delivery of suspects named by the Tribunal;
 3. Immediate and long-term assistance toward the establishment of police and judicial institutions in both countries, including secondment of Francophone police and judicial officers, training, penal and prison reform, and long-term support, regardless of any embargoes on aid in the areas;
 4. Swift information of an International Commission of Inquiry into the Burundi massacres of late 1993, as repeatedly requested by the government of Burundi;
 5. Full funding and deployment of human rights monitors in Rwanda and Burundi;
 6. Restriction of access to visas and foreign bank accounts by extremists and by those who support or participate in acts of violence in both countries, whose names are well known to governments and international organizations;
 7. Preparations of measures to disable radio broadcasts that call for inciting genocide or massacre, accompanied by support for genuine pluralism in the media and public sphere.

These measures can only be accomplished through full partnership among North American, European and African governments, among international organizations, and the private sector. The United States government and public, in particular, showed themselves willing last year to provide generously for the victims of conflict in Rwanda. Despite

understandable concern with our domestic problems, we cannot ignore vast threats to humanity such as loom today over Central Africa. To do so would make a mockery of the international community's commitment against genocide.

Sincerely,

AirServe
Redlands, CA

Latin American Mission
Miami, FL

ALM International
Greenville, SC

MAP International
Brunswick, GA

Blessings International
Tulsa, OK

Mercy Corps International
Portland, OR

Childcare International
Bellingham, WA

Nazarene Compassionate Ministries
Kansas City, MO

Children's Eye Ministry
Upland, CA

Northwest Medical Teams
Portland, OR

Christian Reformed World
Relief Committee
Grand Rapids, MI

Samaritan's Purse
Boone, NC

ECHO
North Fort Myers, FL

World Concern
Seattle, WA

Enterprise Development Int'l
Arlington, VA

World Emergency Relief
Carlsbad, CA

Floresta USA
San Diego, CA

World Relief
Wheaton, IL

Food for the Hungry
Scottsdale, AZ

World Vision Relief & Development
Washington, DC

Harvest Foundation
Tempe, AZ

Hope International
Bellingham, WA

International Aid
Spring Lake, MI