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Preventing More Mass Violence in Rwanda

US Embassy Rwanda

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PREVENTING MORE MASS VIOLENCE IN RWANDA

On May 12, 1995 a group of Americans drawn from government, private humanitarian agencies, and including regional experts, met in Washington to consider the obstacles, opportunities, and options for preventing more mass violence in Rwanda.

Discussion focused initially on the role and mission of the 5500 peacekeepers that comprise the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) as its mandate expires on June 9, 1995. Decisions regarding whether and on what terms to renew UNAMIR will have a vital impact on the immediate security of the Rwandan people, and on the prospects for national reconciliation and stability. Participants also noted that the UN Security Council should view this opportunity to redesign and renew UNAMIR as an essential gateway to long-term regional security and economic cooperation in central Africa.

A second theme to emerge emphasized the central role that France and the United States must play jointly if we are to avoid another disaster and have peace prevail in Rwanda. Renewal of UNAMIR offers the first opportunity for the Clinton Administration to engage the new Chirac government in a fresh attempt to resolve deep differences in their Africa policies that have been largely overlooked and allowed to worsen in recent years. Paris and Washington should give Rwanda a higher priority on their bi-lateral political agenda because of the immediate danger of mass violence, the risk that recriminations over further failures in Rwanda might spark sharper disagreements over the US "Horn of Africa Initiative" or French pursuit of their interests in West Africa, which could eventually lead to an erosion mutual confidence in the handling of important non-African issues. Progress on Rwanda could spur joint efforts at conflict prevention and resolution on other African crises and even fuel their global partnership.

Why Extend UNAMIR?

- A continued UNAMIR presence is vital to protect and strengthen the position of endangered moderates in the Tutsi and Hutu communities, particularly in the aftermath of the killings three weeks ago of Hutus by government forces attempting to close the Kibeho refugee camp.
- There is an urgent and widespread need for UN peace and human rights monitors throughout the country. The original UNAMIR mandate, to provide security for humanitarian operations, must be redrawn now that the camps for the internally displaced have been closed. A reconstituted mandate may permit UNAMIR to reduce its personnel for between 2500 and 3000.

- An effective UN presence in Rwanda will help reduce the risk that further outbreaks of mass violence will slow the return of refugees, precipitate additional refugees, or undermine fragile political stability in neighboring countries.
- UN human rights monitors, representatives of other UN specialized agencies, international and bi-lateral aid donors, and some 120 Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are providing human rights, relief, and technical assistance throughout Rwanda need UNAMIR.

Factors Hampering the Renewal of UNAMIR

- The Rwanda (RPF) government has become increasingly skeptical of UN peace operations and other external involvement, in part because foreign governments and international organizations failed to deliver on promises of assistance, but also because it remains a fragile regime that is frequently unable or unwilling to meet its commitments.
- Outside actors continue to supply arms to Hutu militia in the refugee camps and elsewhere who seek the forceful overthrow of the RPF. This abets Tutsi extremists who are calling for more violent repression.
- The UN is reluctant to commit resources to Rwanda amid severe budget constraints and fears of being drawn into a situation where its mandate is underfunded and understaffed and its credibility further damaged. These feelings are exacerbated by the deterioration of other peacekeeping operations, notably in Bosnia. The recent decision by the EU and Belgium to withhold aid to the Rwandan government following the massacre in Kibeho are further warning signals of the criticism the UN could face should UNAMIR be renewed without associated improvements of the situation on the ground.
- Further deep cuts in next year's UN peacekeeping budget appear inevitable. US contributions to peacekeeping will fall from \$1.3 billion in FY 95 to substantially less than the \$546 million the Clinton administration has requested from Congress for FY 96.
- Rwanda's neighbors -- Burundi, Uganda, Zaire, and Tanzania --- all face domestic political pressures that complicate cooperation with UNAMIR and could, in various ways, subvert peace operations.

- A leadership vacuum exists in dealing with the Rwanda crisis, in the UN Security Council and more generally. This must be filled if UNAMIR and related efforts to promote stability in Rwanda and the region are to have a change of success. Only France and the UN can adequately fill this void but they must first reconcile their conflicting policies toward Rwanda.

Conditions Favorable to a Renewal of UNAMIR

- There is a government in Rwanda with which the US, France, and other interested countries can deal. Moderate forces willing to work for national reconciliation are, however, increasingly at risk.
- Despite some set-backs, the World Bank, other bi-lateral and multilateral development agencies, and a special War Crimes Tribunal for Rwanda, still support the avowed goals of the RPF government and are important elements of a 'peace infrastructure' that enhances the prospects -- as well as the need -- for UNAMIR.
- The large, diverse, and widely dispersed presence of international NGOs in Rwanda also augment and justify UNAMIR; the NGOs already have forged extraordinarily effective cooperation with the UN Rwandan Emergency Operations (UNREO) and can be strong advocates for UNAMIR.
- None of the major powers has vital interests at stake in Central Africa, and all would like to avoid having to be drawn into more humanitarian emergencies. The recent election of a new French Government offers an important opportunity for the US to seek a new consensus for action on Rwanda.

Moving Ahead

- With less than a month remaining in UNAMIR's mandate, the UN Security Council must move quickly to reach a new agreement on the mission, scale, and financing to continue UN peace operations in Rwanda. Indeed, UNAMIR is essential to any peace strategy. It should be promoted as the initial fulcrum for domestic and international efforts to stabilize conditions through peace and human rights monitoring that would, in turn, help provide security in local communes thereby encouraging refugees and internally displaced people to return home voluntarily.
- Joint leadership by France and the United States is a precondition for designing and implementing any UNAMIR mandate.

- A French-American accord can be augmented by a more structured and engaged group of concerned states that could include Belgium, Britain, Canada, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, South Africa, and as many of Rwanda's neighbors as politically practicable.
- The RPF should be given substantial political and material support to strengthen the hands of the moderates. Money is needed now, along with tough messages regarding accountability, performance, and deadlines.
- The donor community must also exercise discipline in meeting its commitments in order to counter the growing resentment over the failure to meet previous assistance targets.
- If a more robust and disciplined "friends of Rwanda" group were to succeed in helping to stabilize that country, then this same coalition could extend its role to promoting peace and economic cooperation across the Great Lakes Region of central Africa, perhaps spawning multilateral consultative groups (e.g. for arms control and demobilization, the environment, water management, and economic development) similar to those that are proving to be effective confidence building measures across the Middle East.

Bearing in mind that the key to any solution lies with the dual leadership of France and the US, additional measures could include:

- Curb the direction, scale, and source of weapons flows into Rwanda and the outlying refugee camps that are becoming increasingly visible and can and must be curtailed through more assertive international action.
- Resolve the issues that have stalled the release of urgently needed World Bank funds that also must be part of any concerted effort to foster peace and reconciliation in Rwanda.
- Prosecute those individuals responsible for genocide under Judge Goldstone's War Crimes Tribunal as an important element of the reassurance and stabilization strategy. Reports that the Tribunal is itself starved for funds -- down to less than \$75,000 to cover operations through June -- are dismaying.
- Counter hate radio and other forms of disinformation that threaten the stabilization strategy through a public education campaign involving all of the major international broadcasters and efforts to improve national and local media as agents of civic education and national reconciliation in Rwanda.