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PRESS RELEASE No. 01/MAR/06**RWANDA: RURAL POPULATION FACING EXTREME HUNGER AND STARVATION
COMPOUNDED WITH ILL-ADVISED POLICIES OF PRESIDENT KAGAME**

Several reports from credible sources brush a bleak picture of a country in a state of a very serious famine that has gained several regions of the country. Indeed, regions such as Bugesera, Kibungo, Umutara, Gitarama, Butare and Gikongoro are particularly affected. The situation is so dramatic that few parents must make painful choices. Lacking food to give their children, parents opt to leave them in fear of seeing them dying of starvation. Other prefer selling their meager possessions such as roofing material to be able to temporarily buy whatever they can find to feed their families.

The main reason of the current food shortage has been mostly attributed by the rwandan government to the extended lack of rain that the country has experienced recently. However, a close examination of the internal political situation and government policies points to other causes.

In a country where more than 80% of the population lives in rural area, the development policies of the President Kagame's regime have been mostly tailored to urban centers and more particularly to the town of Kigali. Indeed, the regime speaks of development by enumerating villas built by the barons of the regime, by displaying ostentatiously the wealth of the few. However, it is important to point out that the great majority of this "new wealth" comes from either the embezzlement of the international assistance and the plundering of other countries resources such as those of the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC).

In the last few years, ill-advised and ill-conceived policies were implemented for so-called reasons of good governance without any vast democratic consultation of the population that was supposed to be the main beneficiary. Thus, the regime implemented a new land law that has resulted in making almost impossible to small cultivators to farm marshes. In past, these marshes have played a positive role in alleviating food shortages especially in periods of drought similar to the one the country is presently facing. Meantime, the land in marshes has been allotted mostly to the old and new benefactors of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF). For example, after selling the sugar refinery of Kabuye for a ridiculously low price to a former RPF "contributor", the regime granted the owner the exclusiveness of the exploitation of the valley of Nyabarongo for the culture of the sugar cane. With one kilo of sugar at 800Frw (more than US \$1.00), this commodity is neither of first necessity nor affordable by small civil servants whose average salary is about 40,000Frw (less than US \$100) per month. It is even less affordable to small farmers while the new "riches" are mimicking the standards of living of developed countries.

In January 2006, the Kigali regime imposed, for a second time, a reorganization and amalgamation of the administrative entities. Once again, this hasty reform made without broad democratic consultation plunged the population in a total confusion and disarray. By creating gigantic entities on the scale of the peasant, the citizen living in rural areas does not know any more where to turn. Instead of consolidating the existing entities and using efficiently existing

infrastructure that has cost a lot to the country, the regime has opted to start all over again. As an example, the old Province of Ruhengeri administrative building that sheltered close to a hundred civil servants houses now the District of Musanze services that had till very recently less than ten employees. At the same time, the governor of the Northern province whose headquarter is supposedly located in Kinihira was obliged to find refuge in the offices of the former agricultural project of Byumba (DRB). This is not an isolated case since there are several reports stating similar aberrations throughout the country.

Without even referring to any other serious problems the country is facing such as the lack of an independent justice system and the non-respect of basic human rights, these few examples indicate clearly how the current regime of President Kagame is by no means interested by the well being of the great majority of rwandans especially those living in rural areas. In fact, the policies enacted by his government constitute a clear demonstration of the lack of interest the Kigali regime has towards the development of the Rwandan people regardless of how many people are living in dire extreme poverty or dying of hunger.

The *Rally for Unity and Democracy* (RUD-Urunana) and the *Rassemblement du Peuple Rwandais* (RPR) express their deep concern on the deterioration of the living conditions of the entire Rwandan population particularly those living in rural areas. While calling upon the international community to come to the rescue of the starving population, our organizations firmly denounce policies imposed without democratic consultation on all the Rwandan people. Instead of building a genuine democratic system having the interests of the population at heart, the regime prefers creating and reinforcing an *akazucratic* system aiming at the concentration and the consolidation of wealth and power in the hands of a selected few around President Kagame.

In order to deal with the challenges the Rwandan people face on daily basis, it is time to set up democratic institutions reflecting the will of the people. To be credible, legitimate and viable, such institutions have to be agreed upon by the rwandan people through a highly inclusive Inter-Rwandan Dialogue in which all the groups of the Rwandan society would be represented. It is only in this context that a durable development could be considered. The RUD-Urunana and the RPR renew their solemn commitment to work in concert for the establishment of a democratic system able to deal and respond openly and freely to the challenges of all the Rwandan citizens.

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