

Remarks to the Rwandan Community
Brussels, Belgium, 15 December 2012
by Brian Endless, PhD, Loyola University Chicago and Senior Advisor to the Hotel Rwanda
Rusesabagina Foundation

Thank you very much for asking me to join you. It is a pleasure to be here today on this auspicious occasion, and to meet many of you in person for the first time.

I have been extremely lucky to be able to work with Paul Rusesabagina and his foundation for a little more than five years now. Paul and I have enjoyed an interesting relationship from the time we met. Kitty Kurth here likes to think that she introduced us. In fact though, we came together through the Rwandan Ambassador to the US, James Kimonyo. You see, Paul, Amb. Krueger and Kimonyo were speaking together at a panel discussion. While I of course knew of Paul before this time, we had never met.

During that discussion, which was attended by several hundred members of the Rwandan community from across the United States, I first heard Amb. Kimonyo give the official position on life in Rwanda. You see, according to Kimonyo, everything in Rwanda is excellent now. There are no Hutus or Tutsis. All problems have been resolved. All difficulties have been reconciled. There are some dissenters, but they are rare. All people in Rwanda are happy, healthy, and on their way to wealth.

Kimonyo drew the perfect picture that the Rwandan government would like us all to believe. Kimonyo also made it clear that Paul and Ambassador Krueger were two of those terrible people who were trying to cause dissent among Rwandans. Unfortunately for Kimonyo, Paul, Amb. Krueger, and the many Rwandans in attendance would not let those words stand, and they made it clear that the truth was very different.

I was very interested to watch Kimonyo as the audience questioned him, and he became more and more frustrated. And then at one point, he had had enough. Kimonyo turned to the audience, and declared that Paul and Amb. Krueger were liars who were fighting against the Rwandan people. In fact, he stood up in front of the assembly, and angrily told us a very interesting story. He claimed to have proof, indisputable proof, that Paul and Amb. Krueger had been seen in South Africa just a few months before, using Foundation money to purchase guns for Hutu rebels based out of the Congo.

Naturally, the audience was infuriated. Amb. Krueger quickly jumped up to rebut the story, but Paul calmed everyone down and took control. And I will never forget his words, he said: "it is rare to see a distinguished Ambassador lying in public, but that is what is happening here. This story is a lie, and I can prove it right now." Paul then pulled out his passport, and showed the entire crowd the date stamps, proving that he was in the United States on the date that the gun running meeting supposedly occurred in South Africa.

This was my introduction to Paul, to modern day Rwanda, and to the lengths to which the Rwandan government will go to lie about and silence anyone who criticizes its record.

This was also the beginning of my work with Paul and his foundation. When I began working actively on issues in Rwanda, I was an American professor who thought I knew and understood the Rwandan genocide. What I came to realize over the past five years is how little I actually knew. I realized how much I had to learn about the Rwandan people and the complexities of politics and life inside of Rwanda.

Over those years I have developed a new sense for the truth about the terrible conditions imposed by the current Rwandan government – both on its own people, and on those in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have also realized that those conditions all stem from poor leadership – from a man and a political party who are ruling for their own interests, and not in the best interests of all of the Rwandan people. They have created conditions in which only a small number of people may prosper, at the expense of others. And they have closed off politics and life in Rwanda so that many are forced to live in exile, some in terrible conditions, and many more flee the repression of the government each year.

I was asked me to speak for a little while today about the international political situation involving Rwanda. As you all know, not only are Paul Kagame's repressive politics felt inside of Rwanda, but the regime has also exported these politics to the DRC. We know the stories – more than 7 million deaths over the last 14 years. Rape and destruction of human lives and property. Human rights violations daily, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and according to the United Nations possibly even a new genocide. And all of this done for access to conflict minerals and power. All to benefit elite leaders in Kigali.

I could spend hours telling you the story of the DRC, but many of you know it even better than I do. Rather than do that, I think it is good to focus here on some positive things that have been going on recently in the international community.

You see, starting with the UN's Mapping Report in late 2010, the world has finally begun to take notice of the DRC, and of Rwandan (and Ugandan) involvement in that country. Those of us at the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation have been working very hard to bring this issue to international attention, and we are starting to see great success.

Sadly, this is not an issue that the rich countries want to discuss. They would rather sit back and talk about their own economies, and their own problems. But since many of those rich countries, especially the US and the UK, are partly responsible for this conflict, it is our duty to push them to discuss it. We cannot let them sit back and fund a repressive government that attacks its neighbor for profit. We cannot let western companies profit off of conflict minerals, when we know the blood that is on that money. We must be the voice for those who cannot speak for themselves – for those who are affected by this conflict, and have no voice.

And that voice has been working. The UN has now reported regularly on the conflict in the Congo. And those reports actively call out both the Rwandan and Ugandan governments for their responsibility in driving this conflict. It is now clear to the international community that Rwanda is behind M23, and that this is not just some rebel force working to overthrow another African government. The most recent UN report even mentioned Rwandan leaders by name, stating

clearly that Defense Minister General James Kabarebe is the one giving orders to M23 on behalf of the Rwandan government. And while the international community is still hesitant to make the connection, all of us in this room know that if Kabarebe is giving the orders, he is getting his commands directly from Kagame.

It is also important to know that we have many friends in the international community. Our friends in the governments of France, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and many others have all come out in support of the Rwandan people, condemning the Rwandan government for their actions, and in more and more cases cutting off aid to that government.

Our friends in the UK are leaders here, cutting off over \$20 million in aid to Kagame in response to what is happening in the Congo.

And in a very positive step, our friends in the US government are moving forward. They have cut off a small amount of aid, but are now willing to publically talk about the fact that Rwanda must push M23 to stop the violence.

We are doing good work, but we need to keep pushing more. To keep the pressure on.

Particularly in the US and the UK, given their influence at the UN and their long support for Kagame's government, we need to move forward.

It needs to be clear to those governments, and to the international community, that M23 is not just some rebel group. This is merely the latest incarnation of a Rwandan militia in the Congo. And as in the latest attack on Goma, this militia is often backed by the Rwandan military. The governments and leaders of the world need to stand up and be clear that this is not an internal fight in the Congo – this is Paul Kagame and his government, along with Museveni and his government, profiting off the suffering of their neighbors.

We need to keep pushing for real action. This should include not just sanctions against M23 leaders, but personal sanctions against Rwandan and Ugandan leaders. Freezing bank accounts, limiting travel in their expensive planes, and showing them that they cannot profit from the suffering of others.

As a recent New York Times article stated, we cannot just condemn the crimes that are going on. We must name the criminals. And in naming them, we must shame them into stopping their actions. And shame their international supporters into doing the right thing.

I was asked here to speak about the international side of the Rwandan situation, but I want to close by bringing this back to peace and democracy inside of Rwanda. Unfortunately, what is happening in the Congo is just a symptom of the bigger problem. As we all know, the problem is an undemocratic government, with a President and other elites who do not care about anything other than themselves.

Something that I have realized over the past 5 years is that this is the real tragedy of Rwanda, both now and throughout its long history. It is not a tragedy of Hutus and Tutsis fighting. It is rather a tragedy of elite leaders, who use ethnicity and drag ordinary people into their struggles for power.

What Rwanda needs is leadership that cares more about people than profits. Leadership that believes that change can come through peace, and that does not resort to violence when things get hard. Leadership that does not look to neighboring countries as a place to rape and plunder, but that looks to neighbors – and the entire world – as places where we can have peaceful cooperation, working together for all of the people, not just for a few.

Rwanda needs new leadership who speak for those who have no voice, not just for themselves.

In closing, I will share something that I realized very quickly when working with Paul Rusesabagina on Rwanda. For the benefit of all of the Rwandan people, peaceful change is absolutely crucial. The cycle of violence that has been going on since before colonial times, and that is clear in the current Rwandan government, must stop.

But I have also realized that peaceful change in Rwanda is not likely to come from within. The current government is TOO good at what it does, and that is repressing the people. Change will require work and organization from brave Rwandans in exile, who can be the voice for those in the country. And it requires continued and ongoing support from our friends in the international community.

Please remember though that those friends do NOT always understand Rwanda. And Rwanda is not as central to their lives as it is to ours. They may want to do the right thing, but we will need to continue to tell them what that right thing is. We need to keep reminding them of the continued human rights violations, about current violence in the DRC, and of the potential for more horrible violence in the future.

And we need to keep standing up and telling the world that they are already involved, and that their help is needed. We need to remind the world that they have a choice: they can do nothing, and the current government can continue on a path of harm. Or the world can join us in standing up for the Rwandan people, and in working for a better future in Rwanda, in the Congo, and in the region at large.

I thank you for your time, and hope that we can continue working hard to make peace in Rwanda a reality soon. Thank you.