

**Press release:****BUILDING LASTING PEACE IN THE REGION:****Are Kagame and his allies truly ready to accept it in good faith?**

May 16, 1998 - May 16, 2025: 27 years have passed since Seth Sendashonga was assassinated in Nairobi, Kenya. Rwandan President Paul Kagame has publicly boasted of being behind this killing, which took the life of a Rwandan who was committed to unity, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights.

This anniversary comes at a time when Rwanda is under global scrutiny due to the war it is waging in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and is being urged to end it.

The Seth Sendashonga Institute for Democratic Citizenship (ISCID asbl) expresses solidarity with all victims of this war and shares the following message with the Rwandan people and friends of Rwanda:

- 1) Our country is facing a deep and complex crisis, primarily rooted in the policies pursued by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF-Inkotanyi) since taking power in 1994. This extremist and bloodthirsty ideology, which the late Seth Sendashonga opposed with all his might ultimately costing him his life continues to devastate many Rwandan families. Worse still, it has now spilled over Rwanda's borders to bring suffering to our Congolese neighbors. For nearly 30 years, President Paul Kagame and his close allies have continually waged war in the DRC with no objective other than plundering its mineral wealth and other resources. ISCID reaffirms that this RPF led policy of bloodshed whether in Rwanda or abroad can only bring shame to our nation, drawing condemnation from the international community. That is why former allies have now imposed sanctions that are worsening hunger and poverty. This is the direct result of the RPF's failed governance: exposing Rwandans and the wider region to tragedy!
- 2) There is renewed hope that a peace agreement between Rwanda and Congo could be signed in the coming weeks. But how realistic is this hope? The

history of the RPF-Inkotanyi shows it has never respected peace agreements. We recall that the tragic events of 1994 in Rwanda occurred after the RPF violated the Arusha Accords by shooting down the plane of President Juvénal Habyarimana, killing him and everyone on board, including Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira. The peace talks currently taking place in Washington (USA) and Doha (Qatar) may lead to an agreement, but its implementation will require enormous effort. For President Kagame, withdrawing Rwandan troops from Congo would mean losing a war he has been fighting for nearly 30 years, a war that cost him dearly in lives and resources. More importantly, it would deprive him of access to mineral wealth that underpins his regime's power. That's why he has compared troop withdrawal from Congo to a death sentence. It would not be surprising if he signed under pressure, only to later sabotage the agreement through other means.

- 3) ISCID firmly believes that lasting peace in the Great Lakes region depends on political transformation in each country. Citizens must enjoy greater freedoms and be governed by systems they recognize and that uphold the rule of law. Such conditions are essential to resolving the refugee crisis. The FDLR has long been used as a pretext to send Rwandan troops into the DRC. Yet this group stems from refugees who have spent over 30 years in Congo's forests and have suffered countless deadly attacks (see the UN Mapping Report). During all these years, Kagame's regime and the RPF have closed all political space in Rwanda, enacting exclusionary policies and persecuting those who fled due to Rwanda's tragic history. We believe that solving the issue of armed groups should be the trigger for a broader examination and reform of political systems in their countries of origin. As long as power is used to serve narrow interests, and dissenting voices are treated as enemies of the state, conflict will be inevitable. Peace means giving every citizen equal opportunities and the right to live freely according to their talents and abilities.
- 4) To build lasting peace, regional policies promoting the free movement of people and economic integration must be prioritized. After World War II,

European countries that had long been at war created a common economic community, which helped consolidate peace. Armed conflict was replaced by trade and cooperation. Why can't we do the same? Should our countries continue spending precious resources on warplanes and deadly weapons, like those devastating eastern Congo, while ordinary citizens are dragged into wars they have no part in? Rwanda is a small, densely populated country. It stands to gain by becoming a leader in promoting regional trade and open borders, which are key to sustainable peace and security both domestically and across the region.

- 5) That wars have continued for nearly 30 years in eastern Congo, for the same reasons and involving the same actors, is a clear sign that impunity is the root cause of the atrocities committed in the region. ISCID reiterates its call for those responsible for war crimes to be brought to justice. These demands must go beyond mere words and be implemented without delay.

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