

**Press release:****PRESIDENT KAGAME CLAIMS THAT THE WAR HE IS WAGING IN THE DRC AIMS TO LIFT RWANDA OUT OF POVERTY!**

Following a particularly harsh speech delivered to Rwandans on March 16, 2025, in which President Paul Kagame urged citizens to tighten their belts due to the severe sanctions imposed on our country by the international community, the Seth Sendashonga Institute for Democratic Citizenship (ISCID asbl) addresses the following message to Rwandans and friends of Rwanda:

- 1) It is deeply regrettable and shocking that President Paul Kagame lied to the Rwandan people by claiming that the sanctions imposed on Rwanda are solely intended to keep the country in poverty allegedly orchestrated by so-called “friendly” nations, to ensure that Rwanda merely survives without ever thriving. He added that it was shameful for the entire world to gang up on a small country like Rwanda, which he insists is merely defending itself. According to him, the war condemned by the international community is a deliberate choice made by Rwandans to promote their country’s economic development. It is in this context that President Kagame made statements glorifying war: *he spoke of a real battle, a war of fire, a true war.*
- 2) The Seth Sendashonga Institute recalls that the war in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo began in 1996 with the AFDL movement, which was successively replaced by the RCD, then the CNDP, and finally by the M23. M23 was defeated in 2013 but reemerged in 2021. For nearly three and a half years now, this rebellion has been devastating eastern Congo. Since the M23 resurfaced, not a single day passes without reports of large numbers of casualties, both among fighters and innocent civilians. As repeatedly reported by the UN Security Council, this war has displaced over seven million people and has been marked by serious war crimes, including the mass rape of women and girls. Life has come to a standstill in all conflict zones: schools are closed, children are out of school, and communities are in disarray. How can President Kagame dare to glorify this war and present it as a strategic choice by the

people for economic development?

- 3) The Seth Sendashonga Institute thanks the friendly countries that supported Rwanda's reconstruction after the tragic events of 1994. It firmly rejects President Kagame's remarks suggesting that the aid received was intended to keep the country in a state of poverty what he described as "living without dying but never recovering." The Institute commends the countries that have now refused to continue supporting or turning a blind eye to the warmongering policy pursued by the Rwandan regime a policy that is claiming the lives of our brothers and sisters in the DRC. While the sanctions will undoubtedly impact ordinary citizens, especially the most vulnerable, there is no other viable way to force this destabilizing regime to withdraw Rwandan troops from the DRC and to stop supporting M23 rebels, as stipulated by UN Security Council Resolution 2773.
- 4) Rwandan citizens know the horrors of war because they too have lived through them just as is happening today in eastern Congo. They should not be turned into cheerleaders for a dictator determined to shed the blood of neighboring peoples in a war condemned by the entire world. President Kagame and his inner circle have played the ethnic card among Congolese communities to divide them and justify the war. Rwandans know all too well where ethnic manipulation has led them in their own country. They must not accept being dragged back into the same horrors they once escaped, knowing full well the consequences. A regime nearing its end always ends up holding its people hostage to maintain power. It is heartbreaking that, at such a critical moment when President Kagame announced looming famine due to sanctions caused by the regime's own failures citizens gathered at the BK Arena in Kigali responded to his speech with thunderous applause. Do these citizens truly understand what this means? People of Rwanda, beware not to fall into the trap laid by those who have quietly enslaved you.
- 5) Rwanda's problems (such as limited land in relation to its population, insufficient natural resources, and lack of sea access) can be addressed through

peaceful means notably by fostering good relations with neighboring countries. That is the responsibility of political leaders. It is time to open the political space in Rwanda so that all its children can contribute to solving the country's challenges, rather than allowing one man or a small elite to treat it as their private estate. The fact that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has, for over 35 years, only resorted to bloodshed as a means of problem-solving is clear evidence of its lack of capacity to govern differently.

Other Rwandans must be given the opportunity to propose genuine alternatives.

Done in Brussels, March 21, 2025

Jean-Claude Kabagema

President of ISCID asbl

