

Press release

“The change that Rwandans are longing for continues to be undermined”

On Wednesday 13 March 2024, the Kigali High Court dismissed Ms Victoire Ingabire’s application to lift her electoral ban, which would have granted her the right to stand as a candidate for various posts which will be contested in the general elections scheduled for July 2024, including that of President of the Republic. This happened after the RPF’s charade on Saturday 9 March 2024, when the party officially announced President Paul Kagame’s intention to run for a fourth term in the coming elections.

The Seth Sendashonga Institute for Democratic Citizenship (ISCID asbl) wishes to communicate the following message to all Rwandans and friends of Rwanda:

- 1) It is unfortunate that for 30 years, Rwanda has endured a dictatorship characterised by murder, terror and persecution targeting Rwandans, not to mention the conflagration of the region with endless wars, while the State is under the yoke of a single person, Major General Paul Kagame, who shamelessly claims that during all these years, he has come to realize that no one in Rwanda is fit to replace him.
- 2) The Seth Sendashonga Institute, as it has repeatedly stated through various press releases and addresses aired on various radio stations, believes that our country urgently needs a genuine change of governance, in order to restore freedom to every citizen, and to combat poverty, hunger and injustice that are rampant in the country, reconcile Rwandans amongst themselves and restore good relations with neighbouring countries, and thus put an end to the wars that President Kagame has waged on the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, including the one that is currently ravaging the province of North Kivu, taking away the lives of many young Rwandans and those of our Congolese brothers and sisters, for each passing day.

- 3) The Seth Sendashonga Institute underscores the importance of the role to be played by those politicians who are not aligned with the RPF in finding solutions to the problems that have remained unresolved for the past 30 years. Many Rwandans living in exile around the world have set up political parties but have not had the chance to have them registered in Rwanda so that they can engage in active politics in accordance with the national constitution.

It was against this backdrop that in 2010, Ms Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, who was living in the Netherlands, made the sacrifice of leaving her family and her comfortable job to return to Rwanda, hoping that she could register her party and thus commit herself to a peaceful change. Since then, the Kigali regime, using what President Kagame has described as a legal barrier, has accused her of unfounded crimes, and the regime's acolyte judiciary sentenced her to 15 years in prison.

After eight years in prison, Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza obtained a so-called "presidential pardon" and was released from prison, but in fact she remains a prisoner as she cannot leave the country, and the party she founded, Dalfa Umulinzi, is not allowed to operate.

- 4) The 13 March 2024 Kigali High Court decision barring Ms Victoire Ingabire from participating in any political elections does not concern her alone. This decision is a strong indication that Kagame's regime has no intention of allowing Rwandans to choose leaders of their own choice. The Seth Sendashonga Institute believes that the fact that President Kagame told members of the RPF Congress that they should find someone to replace him after the coming term of office, adding that this person should be aged between 30 and 40 years, is yet another charade being hatched as Kagame's motive is obvious. The age bracket he refers to includes his own children. On the one hand, it is unfortunate to see Kagame dare to tell Rwandans that no one can run the country apart from himself or his descendants. On the other hand, Rwandans should do some soul-searching and see if they are not contributing to their own humiliation. What is President Kagame made of? What makes him so special and emboldens him to think that no other Rwandan can replace him at the helm

of the country ? And those who listen to this contemptuous speech addressed to them, but yet applaud him, should they not feel ashamed of themselves ?

- 5) Rwandans should vehemently condemn and thwart the scheme aiming at turning the State affairs into a preserve of any one family, as was the case under the monarchy. Our country must be run by people who have demonstrated the ability to rule and who have been chosen by the people through free and fair elections.

This requires Rwandans to understand that the Head of State must not serve more than two terms of office, in accordance with the Constitution. Lasting peace in Rwanda will depend above all on that principle of the rule of law. In this respect, the Seth Sendashonga Institute encourages Rwandans not to capitulate, but to realize that the struggle for true democracy and building a country where every Rwandan can enjoy his or her freedom is the best legacy we can leave to our posterity.

- 6) The Seth Sendashonga Institute would like to thank friendly countries and donors who have helped Rwanda rebuild following the 1994 atrocities. However, it should be borne in mind that, continuing to support the regime of President Paul Kagame, which, for the past 30 years, has been characterized by numerous horrors, including killings, forced disappearances, torture, impoverishment and the involvement of the population in incessant wars against neighbouring countries, all this happening against a backdrop of non-existent political space in the country, without any other peaceful means for changing this regime, amounts to betraying the Rwandan people, since such support is also a weapon that the regime uses to crush them.

Done in Brussels, 15 March 2024

Jean Claude Kabagema

President,ISCID asbl

