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CONCERNS OVER THE LIES AND EMPTY PROMISES OF PRESIDENT KAGAME AS HE GETS READY TO HOST COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM) IN RWANDA.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2022 is scheduled to take place during the week of 20 June 2022, in Kigali, Rwanda. Certainly, once again Commonwealth leaders will want to reaffirm their common values and agree on actions and policies to improve the lives of all their citizens. CHOGM was due to take place in June 2020 but was postponed twice due to [health hazards] of COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Commonwealth leaders plan their meeting, they should consider the major issues facing Rwanda today and which in the medium or long-term future will affect the reputation of the Commonwealth existence. Among these issues, it is necessary to include the main ones such as secure environment, genuine political stability, legitimate leadership, reliable data on the country's health, economic and general development situation, the country's relationship at the regional level.

Given the Rwanda's current situation regarding these issues and for the sake of achieving the desired goal, CHOGM should again consider postponement or be moving to a better venue.

Rwanda Bridge Builders (RBB) , a global coalition of Rwandan political parties and civil society organizations would like to advise the heads of state and government of the Commonwealth that even now, the government of Rwanda is not ready to host this important meeting and that there are signs that participants will not have the security environment required for a free exchange of views in an international conference of this global magnitude. The government of Rwanda has been putting out to the world, public relations agencies' fabricated data and information, empty promises and lies which will surely reflect negatively on the integrity and credibility of the commonwealth, in addition of the waste of time and financial resources.

1. Citizen well-being and secure environment

Rwandan citizens being deprived of their fundamental rights in favour of a gathering of Commonwealth leaders?

The Commonwealth has been a well-known global community of English-speaking nations. However, this time, there are a lot of uncertainties and divisions within the



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community which is today divided over the question to know why and how Rwanda was selected to host such a conference of distinguished leaders. Rwanda has become an unsafe environment for its own citizens. As soon as the Rwandan regime announced about that the Commonwealth meeting was planned in Rwanda, the same regime began to evict the indigenous inhabitants from Kigali – the Rwanda's capital. People lost their homes without compensation and place of new housing. According to recent reports, poor people should not be in Kigali on the eve of the meeting.

Human rights activists, journalists and ordinary citizens who spoke out against these violations began to die, to disappear without a notice or ended up in prisons for made-up reasons. Among them many youth representatives who lifted their voices and opposed the eviction of the inhabitants of Kangondo and other environs of the city of Kigali.

In fact, while awaiting to host the Commonwealth meeting, the Kigali regime has not hesitated to pursue its clamping down on free speech by cracking down on Youtubers who gave a platform to ordinary people to air their views on current affairs that are of great concern to Rwandans, and which the regime tries at all costs to conceal from the public. It is this context that some journalists such as Nsengimana Theoneste, Hakizimana Rachid and Cyuma Hassan Dieudonne were arrested, tried on manifestly fabricated charges, and jailed in inhuman conditions. Reports indicate that prisoners Mrs Idamange Yvonne and Karasira Aimable, genocide survivors, jailed for denying the genocide, are kept in isolation and subject to daily torture. Others Youtubers critical of the government i.e. Nkusi Uwimana Agnes and Bicyahaga Abdallah, to give only a few examples, are subject to constant intimidation and harassments by authorities. Mrs Uwimana Agnes has recently reported that she has been mistreated and humiliated by prison officers while trying to visit her colleagues jailed at Mageregere maximum security prison.

Will there be opportunities for CHOGM to see all these people, communicate with them and find out why they are in prison and are being tortured? Will CHOGM be able to know why the Rwandan authorities expelled the population, killed innocent citizens and imprisoned protesters?

This is one of the good reasons to move the work of CHOGM!



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2. Political situation and leadership in Rwanda

The entire Rwandan political scene is occupied by the so-called Rwandan Patriotic Front and the henchmen of the parties. The current regime does not allow anyone to engage in politics: no new political parties are registered; opposition members are not allowed to exercise their right to be elected to political and leadership positions in the country. All Rwandans who tried to swamp for the presidency of the country ended up in prison or in exile. Deo Mushayidi, Victoire Ingabire Umuhoya, Diane Rwigara and other politicians were imprisoned because they expressed their desire to apply for the presidency of the country. Their adherents are constantly killed, kidnapped or thrown into prison.

There is a real hunt for political opposition outside the Republic of Rwanda: the death squads of Paul Kagame follow them, they used to kill, kidnap and forcibly return them to prison in their homeland.

Dwelling on these 2 points in detail, it should be noted that the situation is deplorable: the situation for civil and political rights is appalling. For example, the ranking in terms of civil and political rights has come down from 24% in 2017 to 21% in 2020 according to Freedom House. The world Happiness Index report 2021, ranks Rwanda 147 out of 149 countries surveyed. PressFreedom Index 2020, Rwanda ranks 156 out of 180 countries. US State Department 2021 report “unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government; forced disappearance by the government; torture by the government; harsh and life-threatening conditions in some detention facilities; arbitrary detention; political prisoners or detainees; politically motivated reprisal against individuals located outside the country” ... restrictions on political participation” etc. President Kagame is considered among the twenty most brutal and ruthless dictators in Africa since independence. Filip Reyntjens, a Belgian scholar whom many consider the world’s foremost expert on Rwanda, describes *Kagame as “probably the worst war criminal in office today.”*

We applaud the recent steps taken by the USA to protect the rights, freedoms and liberties of Paul Rusesabagina – a native Rwanda, Belgian citizen and American permanent resident whose illegal detention in Kigali prison happened after Rwandan government kidnapped Paul Rusesabagina. World-class scandal: Activist Paul Rusesabagina sentenced to 25 years in prison for terrorism in Rwanda



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As a reminder, Paul Rusesabagina is the famous hero of the Tutsi genocide between April and July 1994. At the time, he was simply the director of a SABENA hotel in Kigali, and he took many risks by hiding several thousand Tutsis as well as Hutus who were threatened. The international community had hailed his heroic attitude especially after the release of the film *Hotel Rwanda* that is mainly inspired by his action during the tragic events. The former American president, George W. Bush Jr awarded him the presidential Medal of Freedom to honour this commitment but also in recognition of the humanitarian actions of the *Hotel Rwanda Foundation* that he had created and chaired.

He was forced to leave Rwanda in 1996 and stayed in Belgium and the USA: abroad, he became a well-known critic of Paul Kagame and the RPF government. In 2006, he founded his political party PDR-Ihumure and became a prominent activist in the foreign opposition group to the Rwandan government.

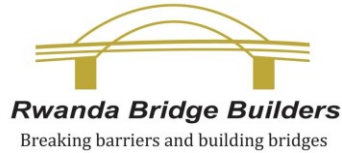
In August 2020, believing he was flying to Burundi from his home in Texas, Paul Kagame's agents kidnapped him in Dubai and brought him to Kigali: for weeks no one knew how he mythically ended up in Rwanda.

The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) on Monday, August 31, 2020 announced the arrest of Paul Rusesabagina, one of the leaders of the MRCD, a platform of three Rwandan parties in exile, including the PDR Ihumure he created, the RRM of Major Callixte Sankara Nsabimana, currently in prison in Rwanda and the RDI Rwanda Nziza of former Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu. The MRCD has loudly denounced the bloody dictatorship of Paul Kagame who has held the country hostage since his military victory in July 1994. The circumstances and location of Paul Rusesabagina's arrest were not revealed by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), which announced that Paul Rusesabagina was now incarcerated in the infamous Remera brigade where the singer Kizito Mihigo was murdered February 2020.

The European Union criticized the arrest in February 2021 and condemned the Rusesabagina's arrest by adopting its resolution 2021/2543 (RSP).

In September 2021 Rwanda's Court upheld a 25-year prison term against Paul Rusesabagina who saved 1,268 lives during the Rwandan genocide. Regarding to the rights of the defence, he didn't benefit from a fair and equitable trial.

It is ironic that one of key players in the kidnap of Rusesabagina, the former Minister of Justice Mr. Busingye has been appointed as High Commissioner to the UK.



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RBB calls on the international community and key donors to stand up and call for the release of Paul Rusesabagina and ensure that the government of Rwanda accept to open up the political space and enter in all-inclusive dialogue with the opposition in order to find lasting solutions to the problems of the country.

3. citizen's health, economic and general development situation in Rwanda

Beside many true stories of state sponsored murders, human trafficking and human rights abuse, the media are served with unlikely and falsified economic achievements; but just few meters from the capital of Kigali, visitors are taken aback by graphic sights of abject poverty the majority of the population lives in. Starvation and malnutrition are facts of daily life outside the glistering buildings of the capital city. This outraging situation coexists with the praise sung by some Western powerful nations, claiming that Rwanda is a success story, just to support their own national strategic interests! It goes without saying that Rwanda has failed dismally to comply with Commonwealth values and principles especially by showing improvement in terms of rule of law and respect of human rights.

4. Rwanda's relationship at the regional level.

On 25.05.2022 the DRC government mentioned Rwanda's support for the M23 rebels, in violation of bilateral agreements. This, indeed, is already going on for almost 3 decades: after the armed takeover of power in Rwanda, the Kigali regime became the champion in the deterioration of relations with neighboring countries. Since 1996, Paul Kagame's army has entered into a long process of destabilizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This army will have clashes with the Ugandan one, it will be accused by the UN in 2013 of supporting the M23 movement and the Kagame regime will support a failed coup attempt in Burundi in 2015. The dictatorial regime of Rwanda will take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to close all borders with neighboring countries, which will aggravate the misery of the Rwandan people deprived of exchanges with sister populations. The dictatorial regime of Rwanda will take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to close all borders with neighboring countries, which will aggravate the misery of the Rwandan people deprived of exchanges with sister



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populations. In 2022, the international community and that of Africa in particular rose up against the new form of human trafficking practiced by the power of Paul Kagame.

Thus, at the regional and international level, there are serious violations committed by the Kigali regime and which run counter to the values of the Commonwealth. Given the serious consequences that these can cause, the Rwanda Bridge Builders (RBB) is advising participants to think twice before committing to attend a conference in Rwanda, where they will not be free to speak their mind, amid health hazards and all manner of doctored statistics paraded as scientific truth.

This will not be the only event postponed or cancelled due to the impossibility of its holding in Kigali: in 2020, INTRA-AFRICAN TRADE which was slated to take place in Rwanda was postponed and was hosted instead by South Africa in 2021. It is really sad to see how the whole world is being blinded by President Paul Kagame. There is no single true story about what is happening in Rwanda and all political, economic, social and security information is but a vain attempt to whitewash the president and his regime. Rwandans and all the peoples of the neighbouring countries know President Kagame to be unworthy of the lofty honour to hosting such a prestigious conference as CHOGM.

By looking a bit back to get a sense of the real Rwanda, the political transition of post-genocide Rwanda, did not lead to multiparty democracy. Instead of that, Rwanda moved into consolidation of authoritarian rule and the country's government is facing today legitimacy challenges. Rwanda is now a very authoritarian regime with a façade of a democracy. As the report of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (2009) rightly points out, *"the regime uses the constitution opportunistically as a façade, which hides the exclusionary and repressive nature of the regime; relies on power structures that sometimes run parallel to, and sometimes cross-cuts the formal government and in which the army plays a central role"*. Some political analysts have described Rwanda as an *"army with a state"* rather than a state with an army.

In May 2011, Scotland Yard warned two prominent Rwandan dissidents living in Britain, Mr Rene Mugenzi and Jonathan Musonera that it had reliable intelligence that Rwanda's government poses an imminent threat to their lives. In September 2019, South Africa's National Prosecution Authority issued arrest warrants for two Rwandans accused of



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murdering Rwandan critic Col. Patrick Karegeya, who was found dead in a hotel room in Johannesburg on January 1, 2014. South Africa's special investigative unit said in written testimony that Col Patrick Karegeya's murder and attempts against the life of Rwanda's former army chief of staff Gen. Kayumba Nyamwasa "were directly linked to the involvement of the Rwandan government." In October 2019, a Financial Times investigation revealed that Israeli software developed by the NSO Group was used to spy on political dissidents and critics living abroad, and even on foreign dignitaries. The spyware targeted individuals through WhatsApp calls and allowed hackers to access personal data on the phone, such as messages and location. Australia's ABC uncovering allegations of a complex web of Rwandan spies, creating a culture of fear among the refugees who had escaped that nation's oppressive regime in pursuit of a safer life. ABC titled the documentary "Spies in our suburbs, unearthing an alleged shadowy network of spies and their efforts to silence dissent." Expats and Rwandan refugees in Australia say silencing critics and suppressing support for opposition parties in exile are among the top priorities of the Rwandan Government.

As noted above in a summary on how Rwanda government behaves, the picture is clear, and it is easy to understand the kind of country delegates will be flocking in to attend CHOGM conference, and what they may expect to get as guests and as a prestigious community of nations! The current April 2022 mess in which the government of Rwanda is involved in human trafficking of asylum seekers and immigrants from UK, and with the similar arrangements to import refugees and immigrants from Israel and Libya against payment of millions of US dollars is a true picture of Rwandan political authorities today. It is a clear demonstration of where Rwanda stands 28 years after the 1994 Rwanda Genocide.

We would like to recall that the current regime came to power through the barrel of a gun and is responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in the Democratic Republic of Congo as UN Mapping report points out. *"The systematic and widespread attacks described in this report, which targeted very large numbers of Rwandan Hutu refugees and members of the Hutu civilian population, resulting in their death, reveal a number of damning elements that, they were proven before a competent court, could be classified as crimes of genocide."*



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While CHOGM preparations may be in advanced stage in Rwanda, it is not yet too late to postpone this meeting to better venue, to grant participants, a conducive environment to consider global issues in a country that welcomes freethinking and speech.

In view of the above, Rwanda Bridge Builders avails itself of this opportunity to urge the Commonwealth of Nations to not turn a blind eye to the repression of human and democratic rights in Rwanda and use their political acumen to press Rwandan authorities to introduce, without delay, much-needed reforms and to guarantee basic fundamental human rights instead of keeping a stranglehold on the people, the country and its resources for cosmetic diplomatic extravaganza to celebrate his economic mirage and empty political slogans.

Rwanda Bridge Builders RBB recommends to the Commonwealth of Nations to make a deep analysis of the current reputation of Rwanda, to recognise how detrimental it will be to hold CHOGM in Rwanda under President Kagame, and consider postponement or moving the conference to a better venue, for the sake of the integrity and the dignity of the peoples and the organization.

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Rwanda Bridge Builders

Coordinating Committee

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