



Hague Conference : facts speak for themselves, let nobody manipulate them

On Saturday 26 April 2008, the associations Dusabane and Duurzaam voor Afrika held an *International Conference on Peace and Development in the Great Lakes Region*, in the Peace Palace, based in the Hague, political capital of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Around four hundred participants from the Dutch, Burundian, Rwandan, Congolese and other communities attended the event.

Mr. Jos van Beurden, a renowned Dutch journalist and researcher, moderated the debate. Four guest speakers gave their contribution to the theme of the Conference. Mr. Christiaan de Beule, co-founder and member of the board of administration of the Foundation SOS Rwanda-Burundi, helped the audience understand the interconnectivity of the Great Lakes problems. After him spoke US Democrat Senator Robert Krueger, who shared his experience in Burundi, where he served as Ambassador from 1994 to 1996. He mainly talked about the numerous atrocities and injustices he witnessed and ended his presentation calling for confession and condemnation of all crimes committed both in Burundi and neighbouring Rwanda. Mr. Paul Rusesabagina mainly expressed his deep concerns about the silence and inactiveness of the International Community in face of: the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the crimes committed between 1990 and 1994 in Rwanda, the 1972 and 1988 bloodbaths in Burundi, the 1995 massacres in the Kibeho camp in Rwanda, the massacres of both Congolese and Rwandan innocent civilians in the DRC from 1996 to this day. His conclusion was a call for truth, justice and reconciliation as the adequate means to achieve long lasting peace and sustainable development. Mrs. Chantal Gill'ard, a Dutch Member of Parliament, mentioned that people need to be united in order to reach solutions to their problems. In order to be united, people have to work for the construction of a real society of mankind.

After the contributions from the guest speakers, a debate was held between the speakers, panel members and public. Based on the presentations of the speakers, the moderator suggested that the debate would concentrate on three topics, namely 1) the role of natural resources in the conflict; 2) the place of justice, truth and reconciliation in the solution; 3) lobby and advocacy. Whereas no participant doubted on the role of natural resources in the conflict, it was not an easy task to determine how and to what extent justice, truth and reconciliation would play a role in the solution. In any case, "justice for all" and condemnation of impunity are deemed necessary. Confession of crimes is equally important as it brings criminals to personally acknowledge and regret their deeds and behaviours. Speakers, panel members and public agree that the efforts made to talk on peace and development in the Great Lakes Region have to be followed up and supported.

Although the Conference achieved its goals, it is regrettable that the Rwandan Government, its workers and supporters have been and are still tirelessly striving to manipulate facts around it. Just because Rwanda happens to be at loggerheads with one of the four speakers, it embarked on manoeuvres aimed at sabotaging the conference from the first time it was aware of it:

- the Rwandan Ambassador to the Hague first came with allegations that one of the speakers never tells the truth about his country. He mentioned that alternative voices need to be heard. The director of the centre that hosted the conference made sure that the Ambassador received a personal invitation. The Ambassador finally stated clearly that he wanted to have the conference cancelled. He never responded to the invitation that was calling him to come and speak if he wished to do so. His real concern should therefore be evident to everyone.
- after this failed attempt by the Rwandan Ambassador, the “Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora in the Netherlands ” addressed a letter to the director of the centre that hosted the conference and gave a copy of it to the two Dutch members of parliament who had been invited as guest speakers. The letter came after a telephone conversation in which the organisers had clearly explained how the participation procedure looked like (simply register on the web site by indicating one’s name, address, telephone, e-mail and organisation if applicable). The unexpected letter alleged that the organisers wanted to deny access to the *members of the Rwandan Diaspora*. A reaction was immediately sent in which the organisers reinstated the open and transparent character of the conference and reassured the Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora in the Netherlands that the 15 people he claimed had problems to get register for the conference, would receive confirmation messages.
- while the organisers were busy sending out confirmation messages to everyone who wanted to participate, they were informed by the Dutch police that a demonstration would be staged against the conference. The organiser of the demonstration was Ibuka, whose chairman, Mr. Gakuba Narcisse, appeared on the list of the people submitted by the Rwandan Diaspora Chairman and who claimed they wanted to participate in the conference. Astonishingly enough, a confirmation message had already been sent to Mr. Gakuba, who was claiming to seek access to the conference and at the same time organising a demonstration against it!
- just three days before the conference, messages came from Kigali, urging the management of the Peace Palace to cancel the conference. The messages argued that the organisers are allied to the FDLR and that holding the conference in the Peace Palace would amount to giving a podium to the “genocidaires.”
- two days before the conference, the Rwandan Ambassador posing as the spokesman of the Rwandan community in the Netherlands, sent a letter to the director of the centre that hosted the conference and to the two Dutch members of parliament who had been invited as guest speakers. Instead of waiting for the promised confirmation messages that every registered person would automatically receive, the Ambassador jumped into unjustified claims according to which access was being denied to certain people.
- On the eve of the conference followed the letter of the Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora, with same allegations as the ones aired out by the Ambassador.
- based on all the above mentioned facts, the organisers clearly understood all these attempts were closely related. They had received registration forms from 376 people. Among them, 27 had registered as members of the Rwandan Diaspora; among them was Mr Gakuba Narcisse, Chairman of Ibuka. All of them, including Mr. Gakuba Narcisse, had already received a confirmation message. Apart from the address, telephone number, e-mail address of organisation of participants, there was nothing else the organisers could know about these registered persons. Most of the registered participants did not even provide all

these details, and they were all admitted if at least they had given an e-mail address to which a confirmation message could be sent. Based on the registrations, the staff of Centre that hosted the conference took care of the admission into the conference area. At that moment, the organisers had no contact with people being admitted or with the staff of the centre, which is made up of people who totally ignore the Rwandan problems. It is therefore unfair and unacceptable to claim that there was an admission and exclusion policy on ethnic grounds.

- when it was clear that:
 - interconnected attempts were made to block or sabotage the conference;
 - the Rwandan Ambassador stood behind these attempts;
 - most people on the list provided by both the Ambassador and chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora in the Netherlands were also part of the plan

the organisers of the conference, in a telephone conversation and through a letter, informed the Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora that the 18 people on the list he submitted would get access to the conference, on condition that he reassured them that his members would not sabotage the conference inside the conference hall. As the Chairman failed to give the demanded reassurance and as the intention behind all the above mentioned and closely related manoeuvres seemed clear, the organisers had no other choice but take their responsibility to prevent anything that would hinder the good order of the conference and the security of the participants. In other words, the 18 people the Rwandan Ambassador and the Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora referred to, could not attend the conference. Mr. Gakuba could also not attend: the organisers had phoned him about the contradictory fact that he wanted to participate in the conference and at the same time demonstrate against it; he said that he wanted to decline the participation and concentrate on the demonstration.

Apart from the names, e-mail addresses and residential places, the organisers know nothing about the identity of the 18 people. Any allegation that there has been exclusion on ethnic grounds, has to provide evidence. Allegations in this sense mostly reveal some inconsistency, incoherence and improbability. The simple question is, how would it have been possible to determine the ethnic belonging of the registered participants? **Discrimination based on physical appearance** is a lie that can only be told to the ones who know nothing about the reality: there was no contact whatsoever between registered participant and organiser; in other words, the organiser did not know how the 376 registered participants physically looked like.

Once again, to put things clear, the only people who could not have access, are the ones who had not registered and who were presented by the Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora in the Netherlands and the Ambassador. As the real motive of these two individuals were unclear, and as they failed to agree that people for whom they spoke would respect order, they could not attend the conference. The Ambassador and the Chairman of the Rwandan Diaspora are the ones who probably knew the ethnic identity of those people. They are the ones to determine on what basis they identified some registered participants as Hutu and others as Tutsi. The Chairman of Ibuka will help them show how they select and label Rwandans as Hutu and others as Tutsi.

As for the allegations about “genocide deniers” and “organizations known to be apologists of the Tutsi Genocide and close allies to Genocidal forces”, no particular attention will be paid at these. We simply challenge the authors of such allegations to go further than stating things: we will react to evidenced facts and not to allegations. At the moment, we believe that such allegations go in the same direction as the aforementioned manoeuvres to block the conference. Now that the conference has taken place, other weapons are being forged, other lies and insults are being fabricated, other attacks are being waged.

Fortunately enough, it has already been realised that the intention is the same. It is the same as the one that silences, threatens and hurts anyone whose views or deeds are not blessed by the Rwandan Government. By way of illustration, let us mention: Human Rights activists of LIPRODHOR, writers, journalists, politicians... who were jailed, abducted or forced to exile, merely because they dared to say, write or do what the Government did not want to see or hear. Let us also mention the case of foreign actors, such as journalists, researchers and Church workers who can no longer set foot in Rwanda, merely because they are not ready to agree with facts the Government wants to dictate. Worse still, similar intentions are nowadays labelling these categories of people as negationists or revisionists. Inside Rwanda, the term "genocidal ideologies" is untimely used to falsely accuse individuals and/or organisations that the Government wants to threaten or jail.

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