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RDR

Rassemblement pour le Retour des Réfugiés et la Démocratie au Rwanda

Rally for the Return of Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda

Ihuliro Liharanira Itahuka ry'Impunzi na Demokarasi mu Rwanda

Pour un Peuple Reconcilié dans un Etat de droit - For a Reconciled People in a Rule of Law
Duharanire Ubwiyunge bw'Abanyarwanda mu Gihugu cyubahiriza Amategeko

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RDR CONDEMNS NON-FREE AND UNFAIR LOCAL ELECTIONS IN RWANDA

Persisting in its imposition upon the Rwandan people of the «no party» electoral system which violates Rwandan citizens' rights to freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, expression, movement and the right to take part in the government directly or through freely chosen representatives, as recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)-led government had held again on 25 and 26 March 2002 non-free and unfair elections at the cell (the lowest administrative unit in Rwanda) and sector levels. On behalf of the people struggling for democracy, freedom and justice in the Rwandese Republic, the Rally for the Return of Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda (RDR) strongly denounces and condemns the non-free and unfair local elections organized by the Kigali government.

Under the «no party» electoral system used in Rwanda, only persons supportive of the government are allowed to be candidates. Candidates are selected by the government; political parties are allowed to exist but only in name. Political pluralism is apparent but not real. The RPF has banned political activities inside Rwanda for other political organizations since it took power in July 1994. Other political parties are not allowed to campaign, to designate or back candidates in elections, to issue membership cards nor to hold public meetings or rallies. All candidates in elections are designated by the government and are forced to stand as individuals and not as party members. Voter's registration is mandatory and election is compulsory. No opposition party is allowed inside the country; all registered political factions inside Rwanda participate in the government alongside the RPF. According to the Rwandan government's propaganda, candidates in elections are persons of integrity who stood as individuals only. However, those selected for candidacy are already known members or sympathisers of the RPF. Voters had no alternative programmes to choose from and vote for. Voting is compulsory. After the call to vote of General Paul Kagame on Radio Rwanda and given the strict surveillance of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the police and RPF's local militias units armed to the hilt, the citizens had no other choice; they were forced to go to vote in fear of being massacred if they didn't, as this had happened in the past. This explains the high turn up, 95 per cent, observed in Rwandan elections.

The ballot at the cell level was not secret. Voters were compelled to line up behind one candidate of their choice among those selected by the government. Candidates who got the majority of persons behind them were declared the winners at the cell level and presented by the government as persons of integrity "elected on merit, rather than according to their political, regional or ethnic group". Those elected at different cells constituting the sector elected among themselves, at secret ballot, the leaders at the sector level. Those elected at

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different sectors constituting the municipality (known as commune in Rwanda) elected among themselves, at secret ballot, the leaders at the municipal level. This complex electoral process is designed in reality to ensure that those elected at all levels are RPF members or sympathisers, servants of the RPF-led government and not servants of the people. It is intended to give an appearance of legitimacy to the RPF-led dictatorial regime while leaving intact the RPF's monopoly of power on the Rwandese state institutions.

There is no independent Electoral Commission in Rwanda. The Chairman of the National Electoral Commission, Mr. Protais Musoni, is also an already known RPF political leader and Secretary-General in the Ministry of local government and social affairs. The current Executive Secretary of the National Electoral Commission, Mr. Christophe Bazivamo, is also Vice-President of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front. All members of the Electoral Commission at all levels are members and sympathisers of the RPF, selected and appointed by the RPF-led government.

The entire electoral process in Rwanda is flawed. The ban on the activities of the political parties should be lifted, political freedom should be fully restored. The citizens should have the right to elect their leaders at all levels by direct suffrage and secret ballot among candidates presented by political parties or independent candidates. The National Electoral Commission should be really independent. The «no party» electoral system prevailing in Rwanda does not guarantee free and fair competition for political leadership; it is anti-democratic.

The RDR calls on the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity/African Union, the European Union, all democratic countries and freedom-loving people and organizations to not associate themselves with tyranny of the General Paul Kagame in Rwanda, to condemn the non-free and unfair local elections organized by the Rwandan government under the «no party» system and condition all flows of financial aids to Rwanda to the liberalization of the national political space and the real democratization of the institutions. It is morally unacceptable to condemn Zimbabwe which allows political parties to present candidates at local, municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections and, at the same time, to keep silence and not condemn the «no-party» system which ban political party activities in Rwanda. Ignoring abuses of civil and political rights associated with the «no-party» dictatorial system put in place by the RPF in Rwanda undermines the notion of the universality of human rights in the African Great Lakes region and elsewhere.

Done in Montreal on 28 March 2002

For the RDR

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