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PRESS RELEASE

The African Gender Award 2007 to be given to General Paul Kagame is a horrendous scandal and an insult to the memory of millions of Rwandan and Congolese women.

The Rwandan opposition under the political platform of the United Democratic Forces (FDU/UDF – Inkingi) fully supports the work of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and the Pan African Centre for Gender, Peace and Development, in their endeavour to create a better future for women of the African continent. However, with due respect to the panel that selected General Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, for the Gender Award our political organisation is quite shocked by this decision. He should be facing justice for crimes he personally committed and for those committed by his army, militia and proxies or under his orders instead of being awarded for anything.

The United Democratic Forces is an umbrella political organisation, whose goal is to install the rule of law in Rwanda underpinned by the respect of democratic values as enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights and other international instruments relating to democracy and good governance.

Furthermore the statistics about the empowerment of women in Rwanda is nothing more than a public relation exercise for international consumption. In fact how many millions of women lost their lives or their beloved ones under the fire of the Rwandan Patriotic Army or the Rwanda Defence Forces under the leadership of general Kagame, his cronies or proxies? How many millions of women in Rwanda and the DRC have been raped by members of Kagame-led armies, rebels and militias? How many hundreds of thousands of women in Rwanda are separated from their partners and children kept in prisons for over 13 years with no justice?

A part from long gone propaganda, Paul Kagame political records make him the bloodiest African leader. He is responsible for overseeing the downing of the presidential plane in April 1994 that killed two heads of states and sparked the genocide in Rwanda and massacres that slaughtered over a million of lives. His invasion of the former Zaire and subsequent wars in the DRC killed about 4 millions of Congolese nationals along with 200,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees.

The timing of the Award is particularly disturbing and painful as it comes when a renegade rebel leader, Laurent Nkunda, considered by the UN as international war criminal is armed by the Government of Paul Kagame to fight the Central Government causing the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people including women and children.

The empowerment of women in Rwanda is more a myth than reality. According to the background paper to the award it is pointed out that “Rwanda is the only country in the world that can boast of 48% of women members of the national Parliament, as well as total gender parity in the attribution of teaching positions in higher education and in the country's judicial system”.

The statistics about the integration of women in the decision-making process look impressive on paper and would deserve praise in a genuine democratic system. In our view, in order to be meaningful, real empowerment of women must be underpinned by a real democratic system and the rule of law that gives real power to people's representatives and not handpicking party stalwarts or wives, sisters or relatives of members of the ruling click.

In this respect, if the forum perseveres to award Paul Kagame an ad hoc panel should review the eligibility criteria and if necessary reverse the decision in order to keep high the credibility of the award and avoid drawing down upon the organization “Femmes Africa Solidarité” the bitter wrath of generations.

We would also appeal to the two organisations to help Rwandans, in their endeavour to promote a truth and reconciliation process through an all inclusive dialogue between all sections of the Rwandan society.

We urge all the participants to keep in their minds the lives, the blood and the tears of millions of Rwandan and Congolese women who deeply feel betrayed by this awarding ceremony where their executioner and torturer is applauded as a hero by other African women. It is indeed horrendous and scandalous. The crucial challenge for women leaders is to clear the blood sully from now on the reputation and credibility of the African Gender Award.

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