

Recently, the leader of the small opposition Democratic Green Party of Rwanda called for dialogue between the government and opposition groups including those based in exile. Frank Habineza has since clarified that the suggested dialogue does not include groups with remnants of those responsible for genocide against the Tutsi.

While the call for dialogue was courageous on the part of the Green Party, and dialoguing with the governments' opposition is important to end the intense hostility between the two sharp divides, there is little chance of it materializing, largely because the opposition has not earned the seat on the table.

First, who exactly is the opposition? Only PS-Imberakuri and Green Party can claim to be opposition of the parties in parliament since they contested the last parliamentary elections on an opposition platform. The unregistered formations like Victoire Ingabire's group are also opposition though their membership and reach is unknown since they haven't campaigned in elections. Ingabire's demand for talks is blackmail at best similar to *tura turye cyangwa bimeneke* (we either share or destroy everything) as she insinuates a return to violent past if otherwise.

Among a plethora of exiled groups the most significant include RNC of former general Kayumba Nyamwasa, Paul Rusesabagina and Faustin Twagiramungu's alliance CNRD-FLN and the various factions of FDLR militia. These groups are relatively well known, have armed wings which have at times attracted support of regional governments in the regular geopolitical competition with the government of Rwanda.



These are remnants of the old order which was defeated beginning in 1994. Several are actively engaged in genocide revisionism and double genocide theorizing, which complicates the possibility of dialogue as they are likely to bring their version of history on the table -which is unimaginable.

The others who call themselves opposition are a motley of groups existing largely on social media managed by uncouth characters hoodwinking people for money.

Armed groups

All these groups call for dialogue with the government in Kigali; actually some created armed groups to force talks. The armed groups based in Congo have largely

been beaten though they endure due to factors including geopolitics. The groups chose armed means to force talks, now that they are losing why should they get talks?

The opposition has lost its moment; its most recent biggest chance passed when neighbouring countries particularly Uganda and Burundi appeared to support them. The support did not seem to be aimed at regime change in Kigali but to undermine Rwanda's rising regional influence and perceived threat to neighbours though this later emerged it was mostly based on suspect intelligence. President Kagame has since restored relations with Uganda and on course to improve Burundi relations. Solving disputes with neighbouring countries and lobbies in Europe and America to deny support to the groups, would deliver more sustainable results. Without benefactors, this opposition is lost

Dialogue is constitutionally entrenched

Dialogue is entrenched in the post-genocide order with the Constitution mentioning it among the fundamental principles; with various mechanisms established by law to implement the principle.

These include the Parliament/Senate, Political Parties Consultative Forum, the National Dialogue Council (*Umushyikirano*), Civil Societies, Media and the newly created Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement etc.

The Green Party admits that some of their ideas are adopted into the national agenda; this is evidence that the process is open for constructive contribution. However, that a political party with seats in parliament calls for a council to oversee the dialogue is an acknowledgment of the failures of the current mechanisms.

It is obvious the existing structures are not inclusive and lack imagination in solving intricate political and social issues. Rather than replace these important institutions, they should be reformed to reflect why they were founded. The *Umushyikirano* while delivering on good resolutions and is a feel good moment, attendance does not reflect the diversity of political views in the country. *Umushyikirano* should invite everyone who is not a criminal or fugitive however much their views maybe out of favor.

Also the Political Party's Forum's internal debates (if there are any) should be widely publicized to stop the perception at it is an instrument by the dominant RPF to keep

other parties in check.

Creation of another institution which Mr. Habineza has called Political Ombudsman Council without understanding why the present avenues for dialogue are not delivering properly will lead to the same underperformance.

Competition in diaspora

Rwanda has a big diaspora and lots of its politics takes place there. The opposition claims the diaspora includes refugees for whose return they are striving for. However the government rejects this and has since secured UNHCR approval to declare that there are no more Rwandan refugees but migrants. This makes sense since the objective conditions for the return to Rwanda for whoever wants exist and government works actively to facilitate return. It seems that residual consequences of the war and genocide against the Tutsi still affect many from returning, with many being held hostage by the armed groups in Congo while others have economically better foundations wherever they are.

Nonetheless, the interests of the vast Rwandan diaspora are important and permanent mobilization therein is essential.

Political space

The issue of political space is hotly disputed. Government supporters insist the political space is open with a dozen political parties working cordially together under the political parties' consultative forum. The opposition insists the space is closed with some dissidents violently suppressed and very hard to register critical parties.

The truth is in between; political space exists but it is limited. Some limitations are due to strict laws a result of the divisive past, the organisation of electoral politics which allow indirect suffrage for most positions like councilors, mayors, senators etc allowing direct suffrage only for president and village chief. This has hindered natural growth of political talent.

The dominance and solid control of the ruling party and its allies as a liberation party that established the current security services means it is beyond competing with. This is similar with most revolutionaries ruling parties worldwide. Further, talks require both sides to make concessions expecting particular benefits. I don't see

what the RPF led government would benefit by giving concessions including positions in government to this opposition. And how would displacing its own ambitious supporters in the queue to accommodate virulent oppositionists be explained?

Significantly, the government and the country it runs is not in crisis to warrant any talks- President Kagame remains hugely popular and achieving perceived tangible results.

Substantively the oppositionists are not representing a set of ideas that has mass appeal and can contribute decisively in the development process.

Rwanda's future is being shaped for and with/by the young and economic performance is where the political future will be decided. The young born after 1994 make up the majority and will sooner than later be the top voting block and their main concern is the economy. The opposition is not providing substantially what they could do better in creating jobs; rarely in communication do they address this issue. Further, most talent is still attracted to joining the government side. With the best talent and strength why talk?

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