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Admission of Rwanda in the East African Community (EAC): the Rwandan opposition views this development with mixed feelings.

Tomorrow 18 June 2007, during an East African Community Extraordinary Summit of Heads of States, convened in Kampala (Uganda), Rwanda and Burundi will sign an Accession Treaty to that sub-regional body.

The admission of Rwanda and Burundi to the East African Community (EAC) is significant in a number of ways:

- It breaks with tradition that the three original members share a colonial history with Kenya and Uganda being former British colonies and Tanzania, its mandate territory -all anglophone, colonially speaking. On the other hand, Rwanda (and Burundi), apart from being a former Belgian colony, has traditionally been part of the wider francophone Africa.

- It is a realisation that in as much as African people were divided during the scramble, partition and colonisation of Africa, the bond of brotherhood was never completely severed and that always there will be the need for unity before we realise our dream of complete independence, politically, socially, culturally and most important, economically. Rwanda and Burundi bring to EAC a combined population of about 15 million people which will make EAC an important trading block.

We, in the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella of political parties and organisations in opposition against the RPF and Kagame Dictatorship in Rwanda, view this development with mixed feelings;

On one hand, it is an exceptional opportunity for Rwandans to work with their neighbours towards achieving our common aspirations namely freedom, peace and stability, respect for human rights, social and economic progress. On the other hand, one wonders the practicality of the communion between those who have achieved bold steps towards democratic governance and Rwanda still suffocating under a

click that is governing by and for the interests of those in power. General Kagame has failed to take the necessary lesson from our past history in order to remedy the ills that plagued the country. Instead, not unsurprisingly he has taken the country, institutions and the population as hostages to protect himself. Twelve years on, General Kagame has not changed and remains incapable of rising beyond his military victory of 1994, and to transcend ethnic sectarianism.

Today, rights that other East African citizens take for granted are not as given to Rwandans. Democratic freedoms are non-existent and the freedom of expression is censured at will by the regime. The continued obstruction, by the current warmonger leadership, of democracy, justice and rule of law can only widen the gap between communities and lead to the destabilisation of the sub region. The use of “genocide” blackmail and the tactic of criminalizing sections of the population cannot forever hide the responsibility, now established beyond any doubt, of Kagame and his principal military collaborators in Rwandan genocide nor can it absolve them from the crimes they have committed with impunity before and after they took power.

It is therefore incumbent upon other leaderships in the EAC to work towards bringing President Kagame and his government in line with standards of the community. Failure to do so and continue to keep a dark horse in their midst would be a violation of their own principles and a betrayal to the Rwandans and their own people.

It would be shameful indeed, if President Kagame's regime is given a free pass to East African Community without demanding political accountability for Rwandans.

In principle therefore, the United Democratic Front (UDF) is happy to see Africans breaking colonial barriers and re-establishing our oneness. Unity for a common cause, amidst both natural and artificial barriers, is one of UDF's core values.

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