

## **“15 Years after the Rwanda Genocide: Successes, Challenges and Opportunities”**

### **Rwanda in 2009**

In the fifteen years since Rwanda's horrific genocide, the government has made strong efforts to address the ensuing social, political and economic problems that threatened the fabric of the post-genocide society. Great strides have been made in the areas of peace and security, democracy-building, health, education and the economy. Among several achievements, Rwanda can now boast of free primary education, with 66% of children enrolled; lowering its infant mortality rate by 30%; and impressive macroeconomic growth (6% in 2008).

Perhaps most notably are the changes that have occurred in Rwanda's political arena. Post-genocide constitutional laws designed to create social cohesion make it illegal to use ethnicity for political purposes, while giving additional freedoms of representation to marginalized groups like women, youth and the disabled.

Due in part to U.S. institution-building models, Rwanda's political transformation has evolved from the bottom up, empowering the masses to contribute to civil society, and striving to teach the government that criticism, positive and negative, is essential for continual improvement.

Continued growth and investment in Rwanda will increasingly depend on stability in the region, and in particular with the Democratic Republic of Congo, with which it shares a border. Both countries are now working together on peace building initiatives in eastern Congo, which feature disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reconciliation measures for rebel militia.

### **Contextualizing U.S. Policy in 1994**

There was a dearth of resources available to *preempt* acts of genocide in Rwanda: no U.S. officials on ground spoke Kinyarwanda, which meant there was no one who could understand the radio broadcasts or read the hate sheets; with only one desk officer covering several Great Lakes states, it was impossible to maintain steady vigilance on the burgeoning situation, and no one available to debrief Ambassador Rawson when he took over the post in January 1994.

Nonetheless, it has been made clear that U.S. intelligence had enough information to *respond* decisively to the situation in Rwanda; the term 'genocide' even appeared in intelligence reporting to U.S. policymakers. But the absence of a genocide response policy seemed to hamper the U.S. government's willingness to become involved in ending the crisis. Until then, human rights interventions had focused on punishment rather than prevention. Furthermore, Rwanda was not an area of vital interest to U.S. security forces. U.S. government inaction at the time, therefore, was consistent with the favored policies in place at the time, namely promoting democracy and providing humanitarian aid.

### **Time and Progress**

Genocide policy has evolved since 1994 but there is still a lack of political will to act against genocide in areas that are not strategically important which must be addressed. In Rwanda, peace and democracy building has been firmly based on eliminating discussions on ethnicity from the political arena. While there are some who believe that this is a "denial of ethnicity" and could compromise future stability, the Rwandese government staunchly believes in the effectiveness of this policy, which they say is necessary to keep the country united.

Also, for the first time since 1994, the genocide is now officially being called the Tutsi Genocide, in an effort to eliminate ambiguity in discussions where some wrongly claim that Hutus were also targeted for annihilation. The Rwandese government asserts that these claims misjudge the true intent of the 1994 genocide, since they do not account for evidence showing that only Hutus who disagreed with Hutu objectives to systematically eradicate Tutsi Rwandese were targeted.

As the country continues to develop its post-genocide reforms, it makes efforts to increase equal opportunity for all Rwandese citizens in education and the civil service. Rwanda's primary policy concerns revolve around continued economic growth, and the rehabilitation and reintegration of war criminals, based in Rwanda and the DRC. Rwanda continues to look to its past to inform progressive policies that will prevent another tragedy from rending the country apart, and create a noble legacy for future Rwandese generations.