

PRESIDENTIAL DISCUSSIONS FOREIGN, DOMESTIC POLICIES

LD131643Y Brussels LE SOIR in French 10 Dec 77 p 3 LD

[Etienne Ugeux undated interview in Kigali with Rwandan head of State Gen Juvenal Habyarimana]

[Text] Kigali--Rwandan head of state Gen Juvenal Habyarimana, dressed in civilian clothes, received us in a modest office in the villa which houses the presidential offices in the center of the capital.

The interview--more of a rambling conversation, as is often the custom in Africa--took place the day after the meeting of the recent joint Belgian-Rwandan civil and military commissions in Brussels. Such meetings are held regularly with all countries which have signed cooperation agreements with Belgium.

We started by discussing Belgian cooperation, the main topic of the interview and we asked the president if he was satisfied with the joint meeting in Brussels. He gave a qualified answer.

"Civilian cooperation is clear, frank and definite," he said. "We are no longer being given false promises. Directives have been issued. Of course, it is not possible to satisfy us completely, but in accordance with our wishes the main effort is being concentrated on rural development, which is essential to the life of our country and also on tourism, which would increase given a better organization.

However, we were disappointed with the cooperation from the national defense agency, which has been giving us aid since 1960. Belgium seems to be going backward in the field of military aid. And yet during our last visit to Brussels the highest Belgian authorities, particularly the prime minister, made us very formal promises. But as far as fulfilling them is concerned, this military cooperation seems to be being curbed. Nothing has happened for the past 2 years. The military commission is making no headway and seems to be paralyzed.

And yet our political choices and the importance of our geographical position at a crossroads are known.... That should tempt the West and particularly Belgium to give military aid to Rwanda. Perhaps this is due to pressure from a misinformed Belgian public opinion? However, the Rwandan army has no desire for conquest and lays no claim to any territory. Our army is peaceable and it contributes to the development of the country carrying out agricultural work. The type of aid we are asking for is equipment for maintaining and building roads and a military hospital which would benefit the whole population.... But we have been met with a blank wall!

Question: Rwandan cooperation is taking new directions. Do the bilateral agreements signed with Libya have a particular significance?

Answer: We welcome anyone who wishes to aid our country's development without meddling in our internal affairs. This is the case particularly with Libya, France, the FRG and China. We have friends on all sides. This is why we accept assistance from the Arab countries, which possess vast sums capable of helping development.

By a fortunate chance, while traveling to Europe in 1974, we touched down at Tripoli where we met Colonel al-Qadhdhafi. Since then Libya has been giving us agricultural aid. Libya is also building a 100-room hotel in Kigali. A trading company has been set up. And what is so surprising about the construction of an Islamic center in Kigali? There is complete religious freedom in our country. There is no reason why other centers should not be built in Rwanda. Our Moslem compatriots are Rwandan like anyone else.

Question: And what about North Korea?

Answer: North Korea is building a youth center. Some people immediately thought that Rwanda was swinging to the left. The Koreans have suggested a program of youth meetings. This is a preliminary plan which will be carefully studied and revised and adapted to Rwanda's needs and particular circumstances.

Question: Some people feel that the great lakes states community (the old tripartite group comprising Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi), of which you have been in office as president for a little more than a year, is at a standstill?

Answer: This impression is false. It did stagnate until 1974. But the administrative services have now been set up in Gisenyi (Rwanda). And the community has drawn up three major projects: the exploitation of methane gas in Lake Kivu, the development of the Ruzizi valley and the creation of an investment bank.

Question: And what are your relations with General Amin's Uganda? The press agencies regularly announce oppressive measures concerning lorry transport in his country.

Answer: The truth is often distorted. I have met General Amin several times. He is favorably disposed toward us and the measures to which you refer do not directly concern our country. But we are sometimes affected by the results of decisions he takes with regard to other states. The regulation limiting lorries driving in his country to a load of 35 tons is one of the measures which was formerly decided in the framework of the East African Community, but it was never enforced. It was necessary to avoid road deterioration. There is one bridge in particular which can no longer take very heavy lorries.

Question: Let us turn to two of Rwanda's main problems. How far have you progressed with the education reform which has been discussed for so long and which aims to adapt the curriculum to suit the country's essentially agricultural needs?

Answer: The scope of this reform is laid down in the new 1977-1981 5-year plan. It will come into force from next year. Primary education will be designed to teach pupils trades and skills. At the end of this stage they will be able to work in the hills. This reform has already been implemented in some schools. It is necessary because of 40,000 pupils completing primary education only 2,000 are accepted for secondary education. The teachers are also going to be retrained.

Question: What is the position on the population explosion in your country, which is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa (160 inhabitants per square kilometer)? Is the subject of birth control taboo?

Answer: Not at all. There is a commission dealing with this problem. It has already put forward proposals. There must be enough to feed Rwandan babies.... In this area it is vital to provide information and to make the population aware of the situation. Several hospitals have experimental centers for birth control methods. A population policy is necessary, but its effects will be slow in appearing.

Question: Does your country still suffer from famine?

Answer: Certain regions do: the Congo-Nile ridge, Gitarama and Byumba. These regions have suffered particularly. Torrential rain has severely damaged crops.

All these major problems have been studied and the draft of the second 5-year plan is precisely an attempt to provide realistic solutions.