

## **President on National Situation, Peace Talks**

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[Report on an interview with Rwandan President JUVENAL Habyarimana by Marie-France Cros in Kigali; date not given: "President Habyarimana: If There Is Frustration, Then There Is a Risk"]

[Text] Sitting in a garden chair on the terrace of his Urugwiro residence in Kigali, President Habyarimana is a little tense. Is he actually nervous? After two and a half years of war and two years of a multiparty system, Rwanda's head of state seems rather tired. This is because he has had to face up to successful guerrilla action from the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR), to the indecisive desire for government participation by the civilian opposition (which holds half of the current government's ministries), and to charges of political and ethnic violence that have been directed at his party.

More than once, his supporters fiercely opposed the outcome of the peace negotiations led in Arusha by a foreign minister belonging to the opposition; the president has alternatively encouraged radicals and voiced soothing opinions. He recently resigned from his position at the helm of his party (previously the country's sole political party) and indicated that he approved of the peace agreements already concluded in Arusha. "But what is he personally doing to ensure that the Arusha agreement is a success?" I heard a military official wonder aloud.

## **Risk**

"What can I do personally? Take part in the debate... I only set the orientations—and not my own. We are in a

multipart system. Orientations must be chosen collectively and this is what is being done," replies the president. However, "contradictions and misunderstandings must be removed so that the peace agreements can be implemented."

After Arusha, might a new guerrilla war be triggered by opponents to the agreements? "We need to finalize the agreements and to explain to the population why they were finalized and what is in them, since they will be implemented by the population. If a large part of the people of Rwanda feel frustrated, then there is a risk that what you mention might actually happen. The risk will be lessened if the agreement is actively supported by the population, that is, if our representatives really speak on behalf of the people," which "is not always the case," according to Habyarimana, although he mentions a recent "effort" in the right direction.

### **No Mention Made**

A few weeks ago, an international commission of inquiry implicated Rwanda's authorities in connection with mass slaughters—an issue which caused relations with Brussels to cool noticeably. "We said that, unfortunately, clashes and massacres did occur in Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, and Kibuye. We acknowledged this, we regretted and condemned it. We must do everything that we can to prevent it from happening again. But if things did go out of hand in government-controlled areas, how many massacres were there in the FPR-controlled areas about which no mention whatsoever was made, even though the report was released after the 8 February attack? We deplored that conclusions (with respect to the president's responsibility) were drawn from the allegations of one single witness—and a suspect one; namely, a journalist who is now in jail."

What did the president do to prevent the massacres? After the Kibilira incident in October 1990 (about 300 casualties), the mayor who actually led the slaughter spent only three days in prison. Is such leniency not bound to look like a license to kill? "Three days? This surprises me, it would be necessary to confirm this." (This is confirmed by the ADL, Rwanda's Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Public Liberties). "We have reinforced security, taken a series of administrative and legal steps against the offenders, and created a Human Rights Commission to advise the government. In my speeches, I always end up stressing that we must all learn to get along together. Since the beginning, I have striven to promote unity."

### **Himself?**

However, if massacres happened, why did he choose not to go to the trouble spots? His prestige would have helped quiet things down. "This is quite possible. Nevertheless, I did make appeals for calm, and I thought that it would suffice."

**"In a speech given on 15 October 1992, you said that the Arusha agreements were nothing but scraps of paper and urged the Interahamwes, your party's militia, to give you their support."**

**"I never said that they were scraps of paper. I said the very thing that I said to you."**

**"Everybody must have heard wrong, then, because everybody translated what you said in the Kinyarwanda language as meaning 'scraps of paper'?"**

**"Nevertheless, I did not say 'scraps of paper.' As to the Interahamwes, we need to agree on what constitutes a militia. Some of them did have uniforms. But other party youths wear a cap or a tie, it is a kind of uniform. We would have to take a look at the behavior of every party."**

## **Partial Elections**

**During the last few weeks, partial municipal elections (only the notables voted) were held in about 40 districts, whose mayors had left office (because of suspensions, retirements, resignations). Opposition parties criticize the process, charging that most notables are at the beck and call of the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND). And yet, the results of the voting were: 15 MRND members, 16 MDR (the prime minister's Republican Democratic Movement) members, four PSD [Democratic Socialist Party] members, one PL [Liberal Party] member (PSD and PL have an alliance with the MDR), and no CDR [Coalition for the Defense of the Republic] (the Hutu party) member. [Footnote—Source: "Kinyamateka," 1 May 1993.]**

**Will the president run in the presidential election, although many people say he should not? "This is a difficult question, since it means voicing a judgment on myself. We need to see what the population wants. What am I advised to do? The decision is in the hands of the party. My wish is to continue to contribute to national reconciliation."**