***Delegate from Represented by***

**The Republic of Rwanda Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf**

***Position paper for the United Nations General Assembly: Special Session on International Indigenous Affairs***

As a dedicated member of the *United Nations’* *Special Session on International Indigenous Affairs*, the Republic of Rwanda has shown its commitment to tackle its indigenous population issues by adopting *Art. 82 par. 2 of the Rwandan Constitution* in 2003 to ensure proper representation of historically marginalized people in the country’s Senate. The Republic of Rwanda will convey its stance and contribute its expertise to find collective solutions when discussing the following topics before the *United Nations General Assembly Special Session on International Indigenous Affairs* : Indigenous Peoples, Healthcare, Mental Health, and Wellness; Indigenous Land Rights, Climate Change impacts and Environmental Protection of Resources; Indigenous Peoples, Poverty, and Development.

“*We no longer identify people by ethnic names*,” said Francine Tumushime, the Director General of Social Affairs and Community Development. “*They are supported like any other vulnerable people*.”

The Republic of Rwanda wishes to highlight its stance against the recognition of indigenous identity for relevant historical issues (1994 genocide) before the start of the committee.

**Topic I: Indigenous people, Mental Health, and Wellness**

Historically, Rwanda has always struggled to provide proper healthcare for its citizens, thus resulting in a vulnerable country in terms of diseases, especially true for Rwanda’s *historically marginalized people*, the Batwa community, who have almost no access to western medicine.

To tackle its nation’s overall dangerous health issues, the government of Rwanda has prioritized healthcare as a main focus of the *Vision 2020* program. Adopted in 2000, our investment in healthcare increased from 1,9% in 1996 to 6,5% of the country’s *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)* in 2013. This policy allowed the emergence of several local health insurance systems with prices ranging from 0 to 8 USD per adult depending on the citizens’ income and economic status. As of 2014, 90% of the population were covered by this system and life expectancy increased from 55,2 to 64,0 years from 2005 to 2013. Plus, infantile and maternal mortality have decreased from 106,4 to 52,0 per 1000 live births and the rate of tuberculosis cases has dropped by an estimated 32% overall. However, many Batwa communities don’t have access to this new system and the infantile mortality rate has yet to meet the proper quota for *Millennium Development Goals 4-5,* per *the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*. The lack in physicians and medical infrastructure remains a problematic, as the training of medical staff is insufficient to meet the population’s demand.

In the Republic of Rwanda, the Batwa minority, which numbers around 30,000, is subject to strong racism and considered (by other ethnicities) inferior beings, which is false, per a report by journalist Nick Ashdown that clearly stated that the Batwa are dignified, intelligent and witty people. They are subject to discrimination, ethnic prejudice and general exclusion from the society and thus, prompt to develop mental illness. In regards to animosity between different ethic groups, the government of Rwanda enacted *Law Number 47/2001 on Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism* or the *Divisionism Law* in 1996 banning identification by ethnicity to prevent further discrimination and racism between Rwandese of the same nation. However, this well-intentioned policy also prevented the government from directly confronting the Indigenes’ distinct problems such as land rights and living standards. Nonetheless, the *African Commission’s working group on Indigenous People/Communities* reports that the government has already adopted a series of measures to improve living conditions and integration in the society.

As a solution, the Republic of Rwanda appeals other member states to create an international fund to allow the poorest communities in the world, among which figure indigenous people and historically marginalized populations, to have free access to medical treatment. Rwanda also proposes an intensification of expertise sharing between industrialised countries to emerging countries, because health is an issue that concerns the whole of humanity and must benefit everyone.

**Topic II: Indigenous Land Rights, Climate Change impacts and Environment Protection of Resources**

The loss of land and properties by the Batwa tribes because of industrialisation, establishment of national parks as well as widespread agriculture is common occurrence in Rwanda. Right now, the Batwa people are not as affected by climate change as they would be, being they still living in the forest. However, the Republic of Rwanda refuses to recognize their status of being indigenous people to maintain national unity and to prevent all further attempt of genocides. Since the 1994 genocides destroyed most of Rwanda’s pre-established economy, the recent development of the State prevents the redistribution of land right to the tribes. Most of the available land is either under cultivation or is currently in mineral exploitation of ores such as gold, which is a great part of Rwanda’s economy.

Thus, obstacles posed by recognizing the indigenous people as a distinct community and letting them return to their ancestral lands being greater than ever for Rwanda’s recovering economy and government, the Republic of Rwanda strongly opposes returning of land rights, but instead proposes an integration program for all indigenous people in urban areas to allow complete access to governmental services and better education.

**Topic III: Indigenous People, Poverty, and Development**

As are many indigenous communities around the world, Rwanda’s *historically marginalized people* also have struggling economies. Without their ancestral land-owning rights, the hunter-gatherers from Rwanda’s high forests had to live in plain areas and lack the skills and resources to survive in a such an environment and thus, live in extreme poverty, in shelters made of plastic that cannot reach human living standards and made pottery their main economic source. Furthermore, the Batwa minorities are misrepresented in the government despite the adoption *Art. 82 of the Rwandan Constitution*, since most of the indigenous populations are ineligible for the position that requires a minimum of 6 years of education As will be stated later, this issue will likely disappear in later years, given all of Rwanda’s recent education reforms..

Although the lands cannot be returned to their ancestral owners, the government of Rwanda established the *Bye Bye Nyakaku Program in 2009* as a part of the *Vision 2020* policy to destroy Batwa tribes’ below living standard shelters and provide them with modern, iron-roofed housing to ensure living standards. Moreover, the general poverty issues have also been considered, by the government adopting the *Girinka Program* in cooperation with local NGOs and International organizations such as *Heifer International Program*, *Send a Cow* and *World Vision*. This policy helps Rwanda’s poorest households to gain self-sufficiency by providing a dairy cow to every family, providing them with a stable income and reducing malnutrition. As of now, more than 203,000 families have benefited from this program and more are yet to come. Rwanda’s education issues have also been thoroughly reviewed in the 2006 with establishment of the new Constitution.

The education issue has already been amended by the establishment of Rwanda’s 4th *Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2006-2010)* that introduced fee-free schooling for 9 basic years of education (9YBE) and this is increased to 12 basic years of education by the *ESSP 2013-2015.* The government of Rwanda even went as far as to guarantee completely free university education for vulnerable groups in its *National Social Protection Strategy.* Thus, problem lies in the people’s willingness to attend higher education and not their economic status. However, most children drop out after elementary education and 77% of the whole Batwa population is illiterate. Thus, the real problem lies in the people’s willingness to attend higher education and not their economic status.

The Republic of Rwanda strongly recommend all other state members to consider an international sensitization program in emerging countries to teach people that education is the path to economic stability and motivate them to learn their way out of poverty. Rwanda also encourages the adoption of free education policies in favor of indigenous, historically marginalized and all other poor populations around the world, because we believe education is what leads to further development.