



USA, 20 Octobre 2026

Open Letter to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium

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Copies transmitted for information to:

- H.E. Paul KAGAME, President of the Republic of Rwanda;
- H.E. Samia SULUHU, President of the United Republic of Tanzania;
- H.E. Yoweri KAGUTA MUSEVENI, President of the Republic of Uganda;
- H.E. William Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya;
- H.E. Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan.

SUBJECT: Request for regional dialogue to clarify our shared history and prevent Belgians and other Europeans from being driven out of the Great Lakes region.
To His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, Brussels Your

Excellency,

URN HITAMWONEZA ("Union for the Rebirth of the Nation") wishes to draw your attention to the historical and security issues affecting the populations of the Great Lakes region. Our initiative seeks to prevent mass violence, defend human rights, and preserve the ties of friendship and cooperation between Belgium and the peoples of the region. It also seeks to prevent unverified accounts from fueling fear or calls to drive out people with whom the populations have long lived and worked.

We are concerned by reports of threats, persecution, and forced displacement targeting Congolese Batutsi. Reports also indicate that some may have joined the M23 for protection; these elements must be independently verified. Press reports describe the Front for the Refoundation of the Nation (FRN), launched and led by former President Joseph Kabila, as a new politico-military coalition succeeding the AFC/M23. These elements cannot justify the actions of an armed group or lead to an entire community being equated with it. We call for urgent action to protect all civilians and for regional



mediation, without prejudging the legal characterization of the facts or the responsibilities involved.

For several decades, the populations of Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have suffered serious violence, including killings, forced displacement, sexual violence, the recruitment of children, destruction, and disappearances. Lasting peace requires that the facts be established, that victims be heard, and that individual responsibilities be examined impartially. No community should be held collectively responsible; every accusation must be based on evidence and examined with due respect for the guarantees of a fair process.

1. Establish the historical facts and facilitate access to archives

The history of the region should be studied, in particular, in light of the colonial period and the administration of Ruanda-Urundi. We propose a documented examination of the administrative, educational, social, and identity policies of that period, as well as their effects. This examination should draw on Belgian and regional archives, the records of international and religious institutions, and the work of researchers from the region and other countries. Historical books available on platforms such as Afribooks.org could also contribute to this research, subject to verification of their references and comparison of their conclusions with archives and independent scholarship.

The legal status of this period must be described accurately. Ruanda-Urundi was placed under a League of Nations mandate and later under United Nations trusteeship, with the administration entrusted to Belgium. This regime did not prohibit all Belgian administration; however, it imposed international obligations relating to the well-being and development of the population. The 1946 trusteeship agreement provided, in particular, for political progress, increased participation of the inhabitants in the administration, and the development of education. We also ask that the practical implementation of these commitments be assessed, including with regard to public services and health.

We ask that a commission conduct a specific examination of the Belgian Law of 21 August 1925 and its implementing texts. Article 1 established an administrative union with the Belgian Congo and made Ruanda-Urundi (an administrative entity having) a vice-governor-general territory; other provisions maintained a separate legal personality and patrimony, organized the application of Congolese regulations, and recalled the limits arising from the international mandate. The commission should establish how this framework operated and how its effects differed in Burundi and Rwanda, particularly in the organization of chiefdoms, appointments, and access to



public office. The law does not mention the Hutu and Tutsi categories; it should therefore not be credited, by itself, with creating them or with causing all subsequent violence.

URN wishes the commission to examine the violence and deaths it attributes to the Belgian colonial authorities, particularly those of Prince Ruvyiro, whose name URN Hitamwoneza says appears as “Ruviro” in some archives, and Prince Mushirasoni. The alleged dates, circumstances, perpetrators, and responsibilities must be established on the basis of cross-checked sources, including colonial and regional archives, testimonies, and family documents. URN also considers that Burundi’s precolonial administrative structures had substantial experience and organization; it asks that this assessment be studied comparatively, without presuming colonial superiority or asserting an overall ranking without evidence.

The assassination of Prince Louis Rwagasore on 13 October 1961 is established. Research based on archives has identified significant gaps in the investigation and evidence that would warrant a thorough examination of the role of Belgian officials. We ask that this responsibility be examined on the basis of the record, without presenting it as a judicial conclusion that has been definitively established.

We also ask that the circumstances of the death of King Mutara III Rudahigwa in Usumbura in July 1959 be clarified; the sources consulted differ as to whether it occurred on 24 or 25 July. The United Nations visiting mission’s report states that an antibiotic injection was administered shortly before his death and reports the conflicting rumors as well as the absence of an autopsy. A later journalistic account instead refers to a yellow fever vaccination and reports an allegation that a fatal injection was given, without producing medical records. The sources consulted do not establish that the injection was a vaccine or that it caused his death. A Burundian article also reports the deaths of Rwagasore’s two daughters after their father’s assassination, while noting that the suspicions of poisoning were not supported by formal evidence; it does not mention vaccination. We ask that medical archives, family testimonies, and available records be examined without reaching a conclusion in advance as to the cause or responsibility.

URN considers that Belgian colonial policy contributed to the ethnicization and rigidification of the Hutu and Tutsi categories, and that this legacy is an important historical factor in subsequent violence. This thesis must be examined on the basis of texts and administrative, educational, and political practices, without making it the sole explanation for every crisis or erasing the individual responsibility of perpetrators. The development of these categories cannot be reduced to a single act or an isolated date. Questions of borders, land, migration, institutional reforms, and independence also merit rigorous study. We invite Belgium to facilitate access to relevant colonial, diplomatic, military, and administrative archives and to support an independent



historical commission, including researchers from Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo, Belgium, and other countries. Its mandate and methods should be public, and its findings should be accessible to the populations concerned.

2. Protect civilians and prevent mass violence

The situation in eastern DRC calls for an urgent response focused on the protection of civilians. Reports of attacks, mass displacement, interventions by foreign forces, support for armed groups, or violations of international humanitarian law should be subject to prompt and independent verification.

The search for truth must also prevent fear or collective accusations from leading to reprisals or the expulsion of people on the basis of their nationality. The populations of the region and the Belgians have lived and worked together; these ties must be preserved while the facts and individual responsibilities are established.

We encourage Belgium to support, together with the European Union, the United Nations, the African Union, and the States of the region:

- an early warning mechanism accessible to populations exposed to violence;
- unimpeded humanitarian access, particularly for the International Committee of the Red Cross and organizations assisting detained or displaced persons;
- the protection of hospitals, schools, places of worship, camps, and humanitarian convoys;
- the identification of captured or missing persons, without distinction as to nationality;
- the preservation of relevant sites and evidence, according to a reliable chain of custody;
- impartial investigations into alleged violations and, where the facts are established, targeted measures against those responsible.

The risk of large-scale violence must be taken seriously, without presenting as certain a legal characterization that falls within the remit of an investigation and the competent authorities. Prevention requires, in particular, clearly condemning calls for hatred and murder, protecting all communities, and prosecuting individual perpetrators, without collective accusation. URN Hitamwoneza asks that the events of 1959 and 1973 in Rwanda be examined separately, on the basis of archives, investigations, and testimonies, and that the memory of the genocide against the Batutsi in 1994 be preserved in accordance with the United Nations designation. Historical and legal characterizations proposed for other episodes must be compared with the sources and



should not be treated as judicial conclusions merely because they are put forward by URN Hitamwoneza.

For Burundi, URN Hitamwoneza asks for the same rigorous examination of the crises and violence associated with the years 1963, 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988, 1993, and the following decades up to the present. The organization considers that Belgian colonial administrative policies contributed to the rigidification and politicization of certain divisions. This hypothesis must be studied on the basis of sources and with consideration of the factors specific to each period, rather than presented as the sole explanation for the violence.

For the DRC, URN wishes the consultations to address, in particular, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, which occurred on 17 January 1961 and not in 1960, as well as the protracted conflicts in the east of the country. The Belgian parliamentary commission of inquiry concluded that Belgian authorities had supported Lumumba's transfer to Katanga and that certain Belgian officials bore moral responsibility for the circumstances that led to his death; it also specified that it had found no document indicating that a member of the Belgian government had ordered his physical elimination.

Questions of identity, citizenship, migration, and access to land in the Kivu provinces must also be addressed accurately. The sources consulted describe the diverse historical presence of Kinyarwanda-speaking populations, including Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa, as well as migrations at different periods, including under colonial administration. They also document longstanding debates about nationality and belonging. It would therefore be inaccurate to present the Bahutu of Kivu, without evidence, as an identity that appeared recently; the consultations should instead establish individual histories, rights, and responsibilities, without denying an entire community's belonging.

The testimonies of survivors, archives, and documents cited by URN including the report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Burundi (S/1996/682), the Burundi Senate report of 1 August 2020 devoted to the Belgian Law of 21 August 1925, the book *Face cachée de l'histoire du Burundi*, and the joint letter of URN HITAMWONEZA and CFOR Arusha dated 7 June 2021—should be examined alongside other sources, with respect for the victims and the independence of the judiciary. Allegations concerning identifiable persons must be verified individually and cannot make a political party or a community collectively responsible.

3. Make remembrance a path toward truth and reconciliation

Political assassinations and other unresolved crimes continue to weigh on the populations of the region. Where new evidence warrants it, relevant historical and



judicial files should be eligible for review, with respect for the independence of the judiciary and without prejudging the findings.

The memory of victims must serve neither revenge nor the protection of those responsible. Belgium can contribute to independent work by facilitating access to archives and encouraging the examination of unresolved cases. Families, survivors, and the communities concerned should be involved.

The role of religious institutions and missions during the colonial period could also be the subject of a documented study. It would concern specific institutions, actions, and sources, without calling believers or an entire religion into question. Any accusation against a person or institution should be verified against available testimonies, dates, locations, and archives.

4. Apply equal standards to all parties

We invite the governments of the DRC and Burundi to clarify several questions: Were Burundian troops deployed in support of Congolese forces? What military, financial, or logistical relations or support existed between these forces and armed groups, particularly the FDLR or certain Mai-Mai groups? If cooperation took place, who authorized it, for what purpose, and with what safeguards for civilians? These are requests for verification, not established conclusions.

The facts and applicable characterizations—including the terms “terrorist groups” or “negative forces” used by certain actors—should be examined on the basis of independent sources and applicable law. Allegations against other States and armed groups must be assessed according to the same standards, without a presumption of guilt. Belgium should contribute to mediation and de-escalation; any allegation that an external actor is fueling the conflict or supporting an armed party must be independently verified and not taken for granted.

Any investigative mechanism should examine chains of command, military, financial, or logistical support, and the flow of weapons. Persons or entities subject to restrictive measures should be able to know the essential grounds for those measures and have access to avenues of appeal. Sanctions, if justified, should be targeted and should not worsen the suffering of the populations.

Peace agreements and transition processes, including the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement and the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, should be examined impartially. Commitments concerning the identification, disarmament, and treatment of armed groups must be assessed and implemented consistently. The integration of former armed movements into institutions and security forces also merits



examination on the basis of the relevant texts, disarmament and demobilization commitments, transitional arrangements, elections, and constitutional standards. This approach is intended neither to challenge the legitimacy of current institutions by declaration nor to call for destabilization; it is intended to ensure that everyone's actions and responsibilities are examined according to the same standards.

5. Organize inclusive regional consultations

We ask Belgium to encourage, in coordination with the governments concerned, the European Union, the African Union, and the United Nations, urgent, transparent, and inclusive regional consultations. They could involve Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan, the United Kingdom, and France, as well as representatives of affected populations and victims in eastern DRC.

These consultations should give a meaningful place to civil society, women, young people, human rights defenders, researchers, religious denominations, and non-armed political organizations. Any participation by representatives of armed groups should be conditional on a public commitment to a ceasefire, the protection of civilians, and respect for international law.

The consultations' mandate could provide for a shared chronology of events, dialogue on opening the archives, and examination of questions relating to borders, migration, citizenship, and land, with respect for the rights of the populations. It should also seek verifiable guarantees of non-aggression and non-support for armed groups, the protection of victims and witnesses, steps toward justice, and a permanent mechanism for early warning, mediation, and follow-up.

URN HITAMWONEZA wishes to be invited to present its analyses and proposals in a peaceful and adversarial setting that respects the diversity of opinions.

Conclusion

Your Excellency, Mr Prime Minister, Belgium can contribute to a renewed relationship with the peoples of the region, based on recognition of the facts, accountability, justice, and the sovereign equality of States. We are not asking for a break with Belgium or for people to be expelled on the basis of their nationality. We are asking for dialogue that

acknowledges suffering, protects civilians, preserves the cooperative relations built over time, and makes it possible to establish individual responsibilities according to the same standards.

We kindly ask you to:

1. receive a delegation from URN HITAMWONEZA;
2. propose a date and venue for an initial preparatory meeting;

URN HITAMWONEZA:



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3. designate an official contact person responsible for this matter;
4. support a regional process devoted to truth, justice, security, and reconciliation;
5. propose a concrete timetable for holding consultations.

A response specifying the next steps envisaged and a timetable would help demonstrate the importance attached to preventing violence and seeking justice.

Pending your response, please accept, Your Excellency, Mr Prime Minister, the assurances of our highest consideration.

For URN HITAMWONEZA



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