September 16, 2017.

His Excellency Alpha Condé Chair of the African Union Roosvelt Street (Old Airport Area)

W. 21 K. 19 P.O. Box 3243 Addis Ababa

ETHIOPIA

Very worrying situation of the political opposition in Rwanda

Your Excellency,

The International Women’s Network for Democracy and Peace would like to draw your attention to political harassment of women in Rwanda. Once again, another woman, Miss Leonille Gasengayire has been arrested simply because she wants to exercise her right to political expression. Indeed, it all began on Wednesday September 6, 2017 when 10 members of the FDU party (party of Ms. Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, already in prison since 14 October 2010, sentenced to 15 years in prison) and a member of the PDP Imanzi party of Déogratias Mushayidi, sentenced to life imprisonment)1 were arrested.

Those who were arrested include a woman, Léonille Gasengayire, assistant treasurer of the FDU-Inkingi political party, who had committed herself to bringing a warm meal to Ms. Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza in prison. Hardly a week ago, we wrote a letter to the UN Secretary General2 over the case of another woman, Ms. Diane Shima Rwigara also persecuted just because she dared stand in the latest presidential elections, challenging him over lack of progress in the implementation of the objectives of the UN program i.e. "Transforming our world: Sustainable Development Program, vision 2030"3, a logical follow-up to the Millennium

1 Boniface Twagirimana, Léonille Gasengayire, Fabien Twagirayezu, Alphonse (employee), Julien (cooker), Théophile Ntirutwa, Evode Mbarushimana, Norbert Uwamahoro, Gratien Nsabiyaremye + the driver, and Jean-Marie Kayumva (PDP Imanzi)

2 <http://www.rifdp-iwndp.org/cas-de-madame-diane-shima-rwigara/>

3 http://www.un.org/fr/documents/view\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85

member countries of the United Nations have committed themselves to the programme, particularly about the empowerment of women in order to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". The Rwandan government, which prides itself on having the largest number of women parliamentarians in Africa, if not in the whole world, remains silent when it comes to persecuting some of them, when they take an independent line from the government’s political line. Ms. Léonille Gasengayire has joined the already long list of women who have been denied their right to exercise their political right of expression. And as by sheer coincidence, Ms Gasengayire happens to be a member of the leadership of FDU- Inkingi (Unified Democratic Forces), led by Mrs. Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza.

The key question is: Is President Kagame really concerned about the empowerment of women?

“Nearly 60% of Rwanda’s Members of Parliament are women, and Kagame is commonly praised for empowering women, but that’s no more plausible than his

99% electoral victory…” - Anne Garrison4.

We are now strongly convinced that the Rwandan government wants to empower women, if only they accept to toe the government line. However, Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, Léonille Gasengayire, Iragena Illuminée (missing) and Diane Rwigara want to have an independent mind and not blindly be party to the line of thought drawn by the authorities. Their common sin is to develop a critical mind. The arrest of the FDU officials in Kigali deprives Ms. Ingabire of her daily meal and of any visit. This violates her inalienable right to security5.

Mr Kagame would benefit greatly from taking advantage of the ideas of these women since many ideas are constructive rather than destructive. What should worry Mr Kagame is that his services have lied to him about the number of people who did not want the amendment of the Constitution in 2015, allowing him to be re- elected until 2034. Only ten people did not agree with the idea of changing the Constitution, according to the authorities. However, reality has just demonstrated the contrary: if he puts together the number of supporters of Diane Rwigara and

4 https://blackagendareport.com/bill-clintons-favorite-african-paul-kagame-wins-re-election-99-arrests- opponent

5 <http://www.blackstarnews.com/global-politics/africa/kagame-cracks-down-hard-in-rwanda-victoire->

ingabire-in-danger

that that number exceeds the announced figure of ten people alleged not to have been in favour of the amendment of the Constitution.

Your Excellency,

We appeal to you to use your power to stop this mockery of the power of Kigali vis- à-vis its people, now pushed down to their knees. One more death in Rwanda is one death too many.

Please make Panafricanism, which is so dear to you, a reality. African countries must make sure that they do not become the laughing stock of the rest of the world by forcing their people on the road to exile. Exile is the last resort for people whose most basic rights are violated.

Please accept, your Excellency, the assurance of our highest consideration.

Perpétue Muramutse, IwnDP inCanada (signed) Marcelline Nyiranduwamungu, IwnDP in Belgium (signed)

Gloria Uwishema, IwnDP in the Netherlands

(signed)

CC

- European Union Commission

- Diplomatic Missions in Kigali, Rwanda

- African Governments