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ONE HUNDRED FIFTH CONGRESS
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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August 28, 1997

Honorable William J. Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In recent weeks it has become increasingly clear that the armed forces of the government of Rwanda — a government with which the United States has maintained an extremely close relationship — have massacred thousands of Hutu refugees in eastern Congo (the former Zaire), as well as Hutu noncombatants within Rwanda. The victims include men, women, and children, and the massacres appear to have been part of a deliberate and systematic policy of targeted ethnic killing.

It has also recently been revealed that the United States has been providing military training, including training in "marksmanship," to these same Rwandan armed forces during the period in which the massacres have taken place. The United States has also conducted joint military operations with these forces.

The United States government's response to reports of these massacres has been consistently weak. The United States embassy in Rwanda, instead of taking vigorous action to get to the bottom of atrocity reports that were received as early as last November, appears to have treated such reports with extreme skepticism. Our official response even to the most detailed and specific reports of atrocities by Rwandan forces and their allies in Zaire appears to have taken the form of polite expressions of disapproval rather than changes in our policy on the ground. We did not, for instance, discontinue either the military training or the joint military exercises.

I am therefore writing to urge that you take immediate action to determine whether the United States or any of its officials or employees has been complicit, either through action or

through neglect, in the massacres perpetrated by our Rwandan allies. Strong and immediate action must also be taken to convince the Rwandan government -- as well as its admirers within the U.S. foreign policy establishment -- that compliance with a certain minimum standard of decency is the price of military assistance from the United States.

I also request that you direct the appropriate officials of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and other government agencies to provide the following information, in order to assist the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights in its oversight responsibilities:

I. United States response to reports of massacres.

On December 4, 1996, our Subcommittee held a hearing at which representatives of several human rights organizations testified about massacres allegedly perpetrated against Hutu refugees by ethnic Tutsi-dominated rebels in what was then eastern Zaire, who were known even then to be closely allied with the Rwandan government. For example, on November 17, Tutsi rebels in Zaire had reportedly massacred hundreds of civilian refugees, some of whom they had lured with promises of return to Rwanda. Returning refugees had also reported that Tutsi forces had seized men and boys, and did not let them return to Rwanda with their families. The refugees believed the men and boys had been killed.

I asked Administration witnesses at the December 4 hearing about these reports. The response was that the behavior of rebel forces in eastern Zaire had appeared to be "noticeably better than what had existed earlier" (Testimony of Ambassador Richard Bogosian) but that "we, too, have heard these stories of the massacres," and that "we are addressing it . . . and . . . we know that in the end the truth will come out." (Testimony of Assistant Secretary Phyllis Oakley.)

Please provide a detailed accounting of the actions taken by the United States government in or around December 1996 to determine whether these reports of massacres were true.

II. United States military training of Rwandan forces.

I also asked at the December 4 hearing whether we provided military training to the Rwandan armed forces, and whether it was possible that such training or other U.S. assistance might be "used . . . in any way to help rebels who might be committing massacres." A representative from the Department of Defense assured me that "I do not see any way that could possibly happen." (Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Vincent Kern.) I was also assured that our military training of Rwandan forces "deals almost exclusively with the human rights end of the spectrum as distinct from purely military operations" (Testimony of Ambassador Bogosian) and that "we are talking about the softer, kinder gentler, side of the military training We have not provided Rwanda with any of the sort of basic military

training that—what you would get at Ft. Bragg officer training, those sorts of things.”
(Testimony of Mr. Kern).

It now appears, however, that we were providing Rwandan forces with training in a broad array of military skills — including “Psy-Ops” (psychological operations), “tactical skills,” and “basic rifle marksmanship” — whose connection to “the human rights end of the spectrum” is attenuated at best. (Ironically, some of the U.S. trainers apparently came from Fort Bragg.)

This information was provided on August 20, 1997, in a letter from Under Secretary of Defense Walter Slocombe to Chairman Ben Gilman of the House International Relations Committee, apparently in response to questions raised by me and other Committee members at a July 1997 hearing. Unfortunately, this response raises more questions and concerns than it answers. For instance, it offers the assurance that “the U.S. military has not conducted counterinsurgency training for the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA)” and that all military training in Rwanda are designed to “foster respect for human rights” — but fails to explain how marksmanship, tactical skills, and Psy-Ops will foster respect for human rights, or what we did to ensure that this training would not be used in counterinsurgency or closely related cross-border military operations.

Please provide more detailed information about U.S. military education and training given to members of the Rwanda armed forces, including the course syllabus and any written materials distributed or otherwise used in connection such education or training.

III. Rwandan military activity in Zaire.

It is now known that Rwandan forces were actively engaged in military operations in what was then Zaire. It has also been revealed, in a report by John Pomfret for the Washington Post, that Rwanda Defense Minister Paul Kagame met with U.S. officials in August 1996 to warn them that refugee camps in eastern Zaire “had to be dismantled and that if the United Nations would not remove them somebody else would have to do it.” (Washington Post, July 9, 1997, page A1.) In light of these warnings, how is it that U.S. officials could have been unaware of the possibility that the Rwandan soldiers and officers we were training might be deployed in Zaire?

How is it that in December 1996, when we received reports of massacres in the very refugee camps Rwandan Defense Minister Kagame had threatened to “dismantle” in August 1996, a United States Defense Department official was able to tell Congress that “I do not see how [it] could possibly happen” that U.S. training of the Rwandan armed forces could have assisted the forces conducting the operations in which these massacres were occurring? Had it not occurred to anyone in our government that Kagame might simply be keeping his promise?

When did the United States government first become aware of the possibility of active Rwandan participation in the Zaire operations? Upon becoming aware of this possibility — and

of reports that these operations included the widespread mass killing of unarmed men, women, and children -- did we feel that we had a responsibility to determine whether the soldiers and officers we trained in "tactical skills" and "marksmanship" in July and August of 1996 had participated in the Zaire operations? What steps, if any, did we take to determine this?

Do we know even now whether any U.S. trainees participated in the massacres? If not, what are we doing to find out, and to make sure that current and future U.S. assistance and training to Rwandan armed forces will not inadvertently assist such conduct?

IV. "Psy-Ops" activities directed at refugees.

The August 20 letter from Under Secretary Slocombe indicates that during November 1996 the United States conducted "psychological operations" and "public information" activities, in co-ordination with the Rwanda Patriotic Army, to persuade refugees to return to Rwanda. The "products" of these operations "encouraged refugees to return to a safe homeland and sought to counter the ex-FAR/Interahamwe message that returnees would be killed . . ." Please provide copies of these "products."

Also, what steps, if any, did we take to ensure that the message we were sending to these refugees was true: that return really was safe for all the refugees, and that no refugees would be killed? Did we feel a responsibility to ascertain this before helping to broadcast such messages, in light of reports by Amnesty International and other humanitarian organizations that some returning Hutu refugees had in fact been murdered? Even if only a small percentage of the returning refugees were likely to be killed or subjected to other forms of persecution, did we feel a responsibility to ensure that we would not lure even a few people to their deaths?

What steps have we taken, at any time between November 1996 and the present, to ensure that our efforts on behalf of mass repatriation to Rwanda will not lead to the involuntary (or effectively involuntary) return of genuine refugees who have a well-founded fear of persecution in Rwanda?

V. The United States diplomatic relationship with Rwanda.

At the December 4 hearing, Congress was assured that the United States had "sent a strong signal" to the then-rebels in Zaire that any atrocities must cease. (Testimony of Ambassador Bogosian.) Unfortunately, I have received consistent and credible reports that a few U.S. diplomats in Rwanda have been such strong and obvious enthusiasts of the Rwandan government and their Congolese allies that this important message may not have been forcefully delivered. I am also concerned that the apparent unfamiliarity of United States policy makers with the basic facts on the ground throughout the Zaire operation -- that it was more a foreign invasion than an indigenous revolution, and that the Rwandan forces were apparently conducting massacres -- may have been in large part the result of these policy makers' reliance on reports from people who tended to discount negative reports about their friends in the RPA and the

Kabila forces. I urge you to investigate whether this happened and to take appropriate action in response.

VI. Conclusion

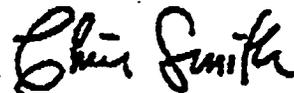
I should make clear that it is not my intention to defend the ex-FAR, the Interahamwe, or the Mobutu regime. All of these entities did terrible things and should be held accountable. The refugee camps in eastern Zaire were indeed being used for cross-border attacks into Rwanda. But in our apparent tolerance of the actions of our close allies in the Rwandan government -- in what now appears to have been our studied indifference to reports of atrocities -- we may have lost sight of the fact that these camps were also home to hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Rwandan officers have been quoted by John Pomfret in the Post as saying that their goal in eastern Zaire was not only to shut down the refugee camps, but also "to take revenge against the Hutu refugees." According to Pomfret,

Rwandan troops and their Congolese Tutsi allies were given a free hand to go after the Hutu refugees so long as they also contributed to toppling Mobutu. Rebel officers who opposed this policy were done away with. One, Andre Kisase Ngandu, a senior commander, was gunned down by Rwandan Tutsi troops

It now appears that a few months before this brutal conduct took place, we may have spent U.S. tax dollars to improve the marksmanship skills of its perpetrators. Even as it was taking place, our senior policy makers were congratulating themselves for helping to make these perpetrators "softer, kinder, and gentler."

It is my sincere hope that your response to this episode will be vigorous enough to impress governments that might be tempted to engage in future massacres -- and United States officials who might be tempted to ignore or discount evidence of such massacres in the interest of promoting other foreign policy objectives -- that they must resist these temptations.

Sincerely,



Christopher H. Smith
Chairman, Subcommittee on International
Operations and Human Rights