

# RWANDAN PRESIDENT KAGAME

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### Paul Kagame

More than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in 100 days during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda which has ignited tensions in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and elsewhere. But Rwanda appears to be a unique success story in the region.

Fifteen years after the genocide, Rwanda stands apart from the many failed states in the region. President Paul Kagame set out to improve the economy and social conditions by reaching out with a message of “one Rwanda, one people, one future.” To have economic success, he needed to stabilize the social conditions on the ground.

In order to make peace, Kagame came up with a specially crafted solution -- using local courts called Gachachas to reintegrate the communities. In each village, the killers stood before their neighbors and confessed, and in turn were offered forgiveness. Part court, part community council, it has made for a fascinating historical experiment that seems to be working for the most part.

As the *New Yorker* writer Phillip Gourevitch points out, Rwanda is unique in post-conflict countries. In Germany, the Jews left for America and Israel. In the Balkans the warring groups spilt up geographically. In Cambodia, the class that perpetrated the violence was easily identifiable and separated. In Rwanda, however, the killers and the victims live side by side, in every village and community.<sup>1</sup>

Under President Kagame, Rwanda is turning into a trade and technology hub. With the help of foreign aid, average incomes have tripled and education, health care, tourism, and trade are all improving. He has also cleaned up the government and the country, making Rwanda the cleanest country in Africa.

The government is widely seen as one of the more efficient and honest ones in Africa. *Fortune* magazine published an article recently titled "Why CEOs Love Rwanda," citing the heads of Google, Costco, and Starbucks as among those who are fans of the country and its president. Kagame says his goal is to have his country stop receiving foreign aid altogether.

However, President Kagame is criticized for being dictatorial and austere, and his government is criticized for human rights violations and lacking true transparency or democracy as well as press freedom- creating new laws that stifle critical voices and charging others with “divisionism” and 20 year jail sentences. *The Economist* opines: "Kagame allows less political space and press freedom at home than Robert Mugabe does in Zimbabwe. He may be planning to bring Rwanda out of poverty, but his prime goal is to maintain his Tutsi government in power. Anyone who poses the slightest political threat to the regime is dealt with ruthlessly."<sup>2</sup> Kagame is documented to have funded Laurent Nkunda and his renegade Tutsi following to terrorize people in Eastern DRC. He is also criticized for his role in the Rwandan crisis and his connection to Nkunda of the CNDP in the DRC as well as giving Tutsis more political power.

He has been called a hypocrite for his stance on foreign aid and his distrust of international institutions. Others maintain that he is the pillar of Rwanda’s national reconstruction and the key force behind its future unity and prosperity.

<sup>1</sup>Gourevitch, Philip, “The Life After,” *New Yorker*, May 04, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *Economist*, “Rwanda: a flawed hero,” August 21, 2008

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