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PETITION FROM PARTIES OF THE "FRONT COMMUN"
CONCERNING RUANDA-URUNDI

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of the rules of procedure of the Trusteeship Council)

To the Secretary-General of
the United Nations, New York

Sir,

We have the honour to confirm our cable^{1/} of today's date, as follows:

"WE REFER RESOLUTION 1605 CONCERNING FUTURE RUANDA-URUNDI CALLING FOR CREATION FAVOURABLE ATMOSPHERE FOR FREE ELECTIONS. ACCORDINGLY WE HAVE ESTABLISHED BROAD-BASED GOVERNMENT. DISCUSSION OF METHOD OF VOTING BEEN GOING ON NOW OVER A WEEK. UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION AND DELEGATION BELGIAN GOVERNMENT INSIST ON VOTING BY COLOURS OR AT LEAST BY SYMBOLS. WE RESENT ARBITRARY MANNER IN WHICH CONSIDERATION PROPOSALS FOR OTHER METHODS OF VOTING MORE IN ACCORDANCE OUR MENTALITY HAS BEEN REFUSED. WE REFER ARTICLE 73 UNITED NATIONS CHARTER AND UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGING GUARDIANS AND MANDATORIES WHOEVER THEY MAY BE TO RESPECT ASPIRATIONS TRUST TERRITORIES WE DEMAND COMPLIANCE THESE PROVISIONS AND IN VIEW CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS DEMAND ADOPTION OF A METHOD OF VOTING IN ACCORDANCE OUR MENTALITY AND OUR ASPIRATIONS. DEMAND ABSOLUTE OBJECTIVITY ON PART OF COMMISSION. EMPHASIZE THAT ACCEPTANCE BY BELGIUM OF UNSUITABLE METHOD OF VOTING MERELY IN ORDER TO SATISFY UN AND RESTORE ITS PRESTIGE WITH UN IS NOT SUFFICIENT REASON TO OBLIGE OUR COUNTRY TO ADOPT IT. CATEGORICALLY REFUSE SACRIFICE NATIONAL INTERESTS TO COLONIALIST INTERESTS."

As regards our objections to voting by colours, we would refer to a proposal we submitted to the members of the United Nations Commission for Ruanda-Urundi, a copy of which is enclosed.

The question which concerns us today is not just the method of voting, but more especially the Belgian attitude in general towards Burundi.

It was only yesterday, 22 July, after a week of conversations and during the discussions of electoral procedures, that a spokesman of the Belgian

^{1/} See T/PET.3/L.123.

Government informed us that, as far back as June, the Belgian Government and the United Nations Commission during its stay at Brussels had reached agreements prescribing, inter alia, voting by colours.

From that point on we could only recognize the futility of the discussions we were invited to attend and decline to participate in them.

Under the United Nations Charter, which lays down the obligations of Administering Powers towards the territories they administer, these Powers are enjoined to recognize that "the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount", it being clearly stated that they are "to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement."

We note that Belgium has not complied with instructions in this instance. On the contrary, it has sought to uphold its own interests, to our disadvantage.

For over a year, since the beginning of the Congolese affair, our country has suffered from the tension prevailing between Belgium and the United Nations. Belgian involvement, which because of the trusteeship has a bearing on everything relating to us, has caused us considerable embarrassment and has done us serious harm in the eyes of the world. We therefore rejoiced to welcome the United Nations Commission which was sent to our country, for we felt that direct contact would enable us to dispel the misunderstandings. We were likewise happy to see a change in Belgium's attitude in the form of an improvement in its relations with the international Organization.

But was it right that our country should pay the cost of these improved relations? The disclosure of bilateral agreements - we must really call them secret agreements - between the Belgian Government and the United Nations Commission shows that Belgium has chosen to disregard our wishes and interests and to avoid the trouble of discussions in which it might run the risk of losing prestige.

But neither we nor the United Nations asked Belgium to oppose anybody or risk anything. Belgium should simply have respected its commitments to the United Nations without, in so doing, ceasing to respect us.

It could have expressed its opinions and adopted positions in matters of concern to it, but it should not have entered into a binding agreement without hearing us first. We should have had the right to exchange views with the Commission without being confronted with an agreement concluded beforehand. In entering into such an agreement, Belgium overstepped its rights and engaged in contemptible bargaining. It also distorted the meaning of resolution 1605 (XV), which was the result of the debates in the Trusteeship Committee. These debates stressed the need of having a Commission in our country to learn about local realities and thus be able to make an impartial appraisal of the nature of the steps to be taken.

But the steps were taken even before the Commission set foot on our territory. The members of the Commission might justifiably have believed that Belgium, in the positions it took or accepted at Brussels, was respecting our wishes and interests, as it was in duty bound to do. Since that time, while we deplore the severity with which they are now settling our problems here, we still hold Belgium responsible, for it is because they know that they have the Brussels agreements to support them that they are able to display such severity.

Everything is happening as if Belgium had undertaken to carry out passively the wishes of the United Nations, without seeking to adapt these wishes, which affect all of us, to our particular needs. This negative attitude is particularly serious as it tends to give the impression that the wishes of the United Nations are necessarily contrary to our interests. We, for our part, are convinced of the opposite, and we doubly reproach Belgium for its tactics of self-aggrandizement which have led it to treat us in such an insultingly cavalier manner.

We were subjected to such treatment as far back as January, when Belgium took a position against the wishes of the country as expressed in December at Kitega and reiterated at Ostend. It no doubt believed that it was thus complying with the instructions of a General Assembly resolution, but, to interpret properly its role as guardian, it should have sought solutions that were acceptable to all, and not to impose peremptory measures. Having placed itself in a difficult position with regard to the United Nations, it thought it might find a way out by ceasing to take our wishes into account, and it is for this reason that we can speak of betrayal.

Our country had the good fortune to escape colonialism, in the common acceptation of the term. As a Trust Territory, protected first by the statutes of the League of Nations and later of the United Nations, and considered furthermore as economically unprofitable and of minor strategic importance in the struggle between the power blocs, Burundi was never "used" by a foreign Power.

After forty years of civilizing activity which we should have liked to be able to hail without reserve, Belgium has finally found a way of exploiting us. We are to be sacrificed for the aims of a blundering policy under which Burundi becomes the stake in an extravagant bid for reconciliation, after it has already suffered from a dispute which did not concern it: diplomatic colonialism - doubtful diplomacy but certain colonialism - more detestable than any other, in which Belgium, seeking to give pledges of its good intentions only reveals its bad faith.

In view of our opposition to voting by colours, representatives of the Belgian Government decided to resume conversations with the United Nations Commission in order to consider the possibility of voting by symbols, which is also against our wishes, without even examining other methods of voting that had been proposed. The idea, we were given to understand, was not to become bogged down in discussions, to vote no matter how, to attain independence and to begin again afterwards if necessary. Such lack of comprehension is beyond us. If Belgium cannot accurately establish the borderline, the proper boundary between sycophancy and normal compliance with the terms of the Trusteeship Agreement; if it cannot seek and find, as we have already said, ways and means of adapting general principles to a particular case, in accordance with the wishes of the United Nations and with our interests, let it at least have the decency not to commit us behind our backs, and let us have the right to defend our own views.

Now that Belgium has deceived us in the matter of voting methods, we have every reason to believe that we are being given the same treatment as regards the whole question of our future. What is the position with regard to paragraph 15 of resolution 1605 (XV), which speaks of the formation of a "single, united and composite State" with Ruanda? Are we already committed, or rather handed over, on this point too? How far did the Brussels agreements go? How

far has the Belgian Government pushed its tactics of exploiting the wishes formulated in our regard, under the guise of co-operation?

We demand to know immediately whether our country still belongs to us, whether our future still belongs to us, or whether we are now only pawns in the Belgian scheme of things.

The question of the voting method was not just a detail. The objectivity of the electoral consultation depends essentially on whether the voting method is consistent with the national way of thinking. Such objectivity alone can guarantee that the country will select genuine representatives capable of guiding it towards the future it desires.

The mere fact that UPRONA agrees to the voting methods decided on by Belgium is not sufficient evidence that this method is consistent with the national way of thinking, for it must be noted that the UPRONA people themselves are opposed to this system, and that the agreement commits only a few leaders. Hence, in arrogating to itself the right to settle the matter without valid evidence or guarantees, Belgium has improperly committed the future of the peoples entrusted to its care. It has seriously jeopardized our sovereignty, and whatever the difficulties or even the persecution we may face in censuring this abuse, we could not make ourselves accomplices by our tacit acceptance.

We have the right to speak on behalf of the country. According to the results of the communal elections, we represent 80 per cent of the population, and even on the basis of the proportional representation of political trends such as the United Nations Commission accepted in order to broaden the government, we represent three groups out of four. It must also be remembered that our moderation is not weakness. We scorn futile violence and have always despised demagogic methods inside as well as outside the Territory. Quite recently, during the talks which led to the formation of the Government of National Union, Commissioner Gassou himself acknowledged our political maturity and congratulated us on it. We regret that Belgium should have disregarded this and thought that we would accept any ruse whatsoever, without discernment and without indignation.

In the present circumstances, we are determined not to co-operate any further or to participate in any discussions that are as hypocritical as they are futile.

Agreements have been made behind our backs, agreements in which Belgium thought it could commit our future. These agreements were concluded "in line with Belgian interests", as one representative of the Belgian Government told us. We could only feel their effects, though we had not given our consent.

And the cruelest irony is the attempt to extract a semblance of consent from us. A representative of the Belgian Government asked us if we planned to take part in the elections in which the voting would be by colours. Does one ask a man if he is taking part in the downpour that soaks him? And must he consent to the downpour as well? The question of elections is part of the whole issue affecting our future. We could not presume to define our attitude so long as Belgium keeps us in ignorance of the arrangements it has taken upon itself to make.

We accordingly ask the United Nations, through you:

1. to enjoin the Administering Authority to inform us of the reasons for and of the nature and scope of the negotiations it has carried out on matters of concern to us, and of its reasons for concealing them from us;
2. to acknowledge that we are taking no further part in meetings and discussions in which our views are heard not so that they may be taken into consideration, but solely in order to induce us to ratify positions taken without us and against us;
3. to enjoin Belgium to respect henceforth, as is its duty, our right to free expression and self-determination, and to treat us strictly in accordance with Article 76 (b) of the United Nations Charter, which lays down that one objective of the Trusteeship System is "to promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement.";
4. to recommend to the representatives of the United Nations in our country that they seek impartially with us solutions consistent with our interests, ignoring Belgian blandishments.

We should be grateful to you, Sir, if you would communicate this statement of our position to the various delegations, and we have the honour to be, etc.

For the Front Commun Populaire et Démocrate:

The PDC

J. NTIDENDEREZA
N. KAJA

The PDR and MRB

P. BIGAYIMFUNZI
L. ZURUZURU

The popular parties
(PP, UNB, MPB, RPB, VPM)

J. CIMPAYE
E. NIGANE

METHOD OF VOTING

Our parties wish first of all to emphasize how important it is for the country that the voting method should be carefully chosen. The elections will reflect national opinion only in so far as the voting method corresponds to the population's way of thinking and thus offers the masses a means of expression of which they can avail themselves.

The system adopted must meet the general requirements of democratic elections, inter alia, freedom of opinion at all stages of the electoral operation and secrecy of the ballot, and it must also conform to the requirements peculiar to our country.

The method of voting by colours does not seem to us to meet these requirements. In the light of our special circumstances, it has serious disadvantages:

(1) In our culture, colours, like other signs, have their own peculiar symbolism. Confusion could arise, in respect of a colour, between its traditional symbolism and its meaning in the election, and the outcome of the election would thus be distorted, the more so as unscrupulous campaigners would not fail to encourage and promote the misinterpretation.

(2) This is not Burundi's first election experience. We have voted since 1953 (for the sub-chiefdom, chiefdom and district councils and for the Council of the State), and we have always used the written nominal ballot system. Literate voters will view the adoption of a colour system as a retrogression to oversimplified methods that will seem to them inconsistent with the seriousness of the election. Nor will the colour system help the illiterate voters, since in any case they assist each other in explaining the meaning and procedures of the operation, the characteristics of the different parties, etc., and they may be misled on this occasion.

Moreover, it will be difficult for an uneducated man, considering the little time left before the elections, to assimilate the system, to distinguish between the parties (since he is accustomed to thinking in terms of candidates), to distinguish between the colours (this distinction is not familiar to us and covers only five basic colours), to establish the colour/party relationship and to

remember all this when he finds himself at the ballot-box. In his confusion, he might easily cast an invalid or even the wrong vote.

(3) The voting method to be adopted should take into consideration our inclinations and our level of political development. Voting with coloured ballot-papers is based on the notion of party, but our normal method of selection is based on the individual. This is a reflection of the personalistic tendency which is ingrained in our character and which is present at all levels and in all aspects of our social organization. From the basic to the largest unit, from the family to the State, our relationships are linked together not by systems but by persons. We have confidence in "someone", not in "something". It must be borne in mind that we do not live in population centres where ideas can become generalized into systems; on the contrary, ideas are individualized within small local units. It is for these reasons that the country was divided into small administrative areas (circonscriptions), so that the voter and the candidate could be close to one another. The method of voting must likewise respect this need for a direct relationship between the elector and the elected. Voting by colours is not therefore suitable, for the symbolic representation of a party erases the individuality of the candidate, while the fact is that the party interests the voter only as it is personified in the candidate.

(4) The adoption of a system of voting by colours will encounter insurmountable physical difficulties.

How can sufficient colours be found for all the individual candidates, who, as emerges from point (3) above, will certainly be numerous, as was the case in the communal elections? Only five basic colours are to be used, and some are furthermore subject to customary "taboos". The adoption of voting by colours would therefore lead to the elimination of individual candidates and to the forced adherence of small parties to a few major trends in which their individuality would be lost. This, I repeat, is contrary to our way of thinking, and also to the right of free expression.

(5) During the electoral campaign itself, the system of voting by symbols would raise serious difficulties.

Parties will try to force voters to accept their colours. There will be tracts, arm-bands, cloths and emblems of all sorts which supporters will be obliged to carry or wear and induce others to carry or wear. What will then become of electoral secrecy? The need to observe such secrecy is not confined to the brief moment spent in the polling-booth. Every voter has the right - and should therefore have the opportunity - to keep his convictions to himself at all times and not to be drawn into advertising them openly. For, whatever ballot-paper he deposits in the box, he will be classified in the minds of all as the one who bore - or refused to bear - the colours of this or that party. If the nominal ballot is criticized as violating secrecy because of a single person - the scribe - then there must be far more serious objections to a system which leads the voter to advertise his opinions to a large number of people. This inevitable advertising will cause trouble. In an atmosphere which becomes steadily tenser as the elections approach, encounters between persons showing the colours of rival parties will lead to clashes, and this will be particularly dangerous on election day itself, when groups so "labelled" will post themselves or mill about close to the polling stations.

(6) This system will give rise to irregularities in the actual voting. Whatever precautions are taken to ensure, for instance, that the voter personally destroys the unused coloured ballots in the polling-booth, either by throwing them into a suitable receptacle or by any other means, there will be nothing to prevent the campaigners from intimidating voters by telling them that they must, if they wish to escape reprisals, come back and show the unused papers, so that their vote can be checked. Whatever is done by way of information, supervision or assurances that offenders will be dissuaded or punished, such threats will prevail, especially as they will be uttered in the name of loyalty to the Mwami.

In fact, UPRONA has always used the campaign slogan "For or against the Mwami". Anticipating a system of voting by colours, it has been bringing this up to date for the last few weeks with the theme "The Mwami's colour". This will finally reduce the electorate to a choice between the "Mwami's colour" and all the others, and nobody will dare refuse to submit to a check aimed at determining whether he has in fact remained loyal to the Mwami by voting for "his" colour.

Having had occasion to observe this adaptation of UPRONA's propaganda to the colour system, we wonder on what assumption UPRONA has deemed that it can use this system, even before any national agreement has been reached on it.

(7) The post-electoral consequences of voting by colours will also be serious.

We have already remarked that the symbolic representation of a party erases the individuality of the candidates. Again, and despite the personal campaigning of the candidates, the voter may well be overwhelmed by "colour publicity". In this confusing situation he will miscast his vote and later he will not find his real representatives among the elected candidates but rather people imposed by the parties, taking advantage of the confusion, and consequently he will feel that he has been deceived. The Assembly resulting from this misunderstanding will not have the confidence of the people, and the government it forms will lack authority at a time when a strong and respected government will be most essential.

Thus, to summarize, we can criticize voting by colours for the following reasons:

- It creates many sources of confusion apt to cloud the voter's judgement and hence distort the outcome of the election;
- It does not respect the freedom either of the candidates or of the electorate. On the one hand, the system will lead to the elimination of individual candidates and to the forced alignment of small parties, while on the other, it will expose the voter to all sorts of coercion, misuse of influence, trickery and threats, as we have just described;
- It does not respect our own inclinations and characteristics. This is surely the most serious criticism. The elections will not be meaningful, as we have said, unless the procedures are related to the voters. Everything must be done so that the voter can make his choice serenely, relying on his normal criteria and without being diverted by new-fangled devices.

Voting by colours will upset everybody. While offering no appreciable advantage to illiterate voters - who will continue to depend on others until they find themselves in the polling-booth - it will, because of its primitive nature, irritate those who can vote without assistance, and it must be remembered in this connexion that our country ranks not among the last, but among the first countries of Africa so far as the percentage of educated population is concerned.

What is more, this system, which is recommended to ensure the absolute secrecy of the ballot, does this to a far lesser extent than the written nominal ballot system. It involves, as we have said, the open and compulsory advertisement of opinions during the electoral campaign, and it will open the way to "checks" on voting, in blatant violation of the secrecy of the ballot. At the risk of being accused of a play on words, we should be tempted to say that it ensures a secret ballot only symbolically.....

The written nominal ballot system involves, for the illiterate person, the assistance of a scribe. But it is clear that every voter confides the secret of his vote to at least a few persons in his immediate circle of friends. And this entails no violation, for everyone is free to confide. Hence, with the assurance that the scribe is in fact the "confidant" chosen by the voter himself, the written nominal ballot system, which corresponds best to our way of thinking, also appears to be more in keeping with the discretion which must be observed than any other system.

On so important an occasion, it is for the country itself to choose and adopt the mode of expression which suits it best. Suggestions and references from outside are helpful to us as a guide, but they cannot become mandatory. Nor can we pass hasty judgement on the question; we want the discussions to produce some result, but not at the cost of the country's better interests.

It is for this reason that we have recorded here our views on the matter.

Having done so, we reaffirm that we must uphold the nominal ballot system, with the following improvements:

- ballot-papers should be printed bearing the names of the candidates and with corresponding boxes to be filled in, thus enabling over 50 per cent of the electorate to vote without assistance or at least to check the assistance given;
- full guarantees as regards the free choice of scribes.

We conclude by recalling in this connexion a statement made by Mr. NTIRUHWAMA, of UPRONA, at the Kitega talks on 19 December 1960 during the discussion of the draft order to regulate the legislative procedure for the election:

"The draft order," he said, "offers every guarantee, since the voter is always free to have the person of his choice act as scribe."

Kitega, 20 July 1961

For the PDC

Sgd. P. BAGANZICHAHA

Sgd. C. KIYUKU

Sgd. M. NGOMIRAKIZA

Sgd. S. SAYUMWE

For the UPP

Sgd. E. NIGANE

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Sgd. P. BIGAYIMPUNZI

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