

Rwanda : Dutch NGOs Urge Donors to Freeze Aid to Kigali

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Four Dutch NGOs have urged Rwanda's development partners - the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom - to freeze parts of their government aid to the country and to stop current negotiations on new memorandums of understanding with the Kigali administration, pending the fulfilment of two requirements.

In a report evaluating developments in Rwanda in 2003, the NGOs called for the aid freeze until independent investigations about the disappearance in early 2003 of five people, among them political opponents to the ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), are held, and until the government gives a credible reaction to accusations made by a UN team that investigated the role Rwanda played in the exploitation of natural resources in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The NGOs released the 62-page Rwanda monitoring report, titled 'Tell our government it is OK to be criticised!', on 10 February from The Hague. In it, they detailed the benchmarks used in their evaluation and the recommendations to be implemented in order to "make aid possible in a context conducive to an effective development process".

"After 2003, we are compelled to stare the reality in the face," the NGOs said in an opening statement to their report. "As this report will show, space for political debate has nearly disappeared, a climate of fear, abuse of power and exclusion is now dominating [in Rwanda]."

The NGOs - CORDAID, ICCO, KERKINACTIE and NOVIB, urged donor government to challenge the Rwandan government more systematically on human rights violations and other signs of the tightening of political power. "The dialogue needs to be more regular and more strict," their report recommended.

Moreover, the NGOs said, other donor countries and institutions, including the EU, Belgium and Germany, should consider freezing parts of government aid and budget support, in close collaboration with the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

"After a satisfactory response by Rwanda, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom should negotiate a new MOU [memorandum of understanding], which should include a 'Democracy Pact for Rwanda' as the basis for any future development cooperation programme," the NGOs said in the report.

Conflict resolution, national unity and reconciliation as well as good governance were the benchmarks the NGOs used in their evaluation of Rwanda's development in 2003.

Under conflict resolution, the NGOs said that Rwandan delivered arms, training and other forms of military support to different militia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) "though on a lower scale than before".

"Rwandan interference in the DRC remains a threat to peace and stability in the region," the NGOs said. They added that there was no new evidence available that linked Rwanda to a continued large scale economic enterprise in eastern DRC, "though there are some hints of a new involvement in diamonds and gold".

The NGOs also said that tension between Rwanda and Uganda had come to the forefront in the embattled district of Ituri, Orientale Province.

"Rwanda takes its share of responsibility for this war through its support to the UPC [Union des Patriotes Congolais] militia through military training, arms and ammunition delivery," they said.

They added, "The war in Ituri, costing the lives of thousands of civilians, is partially a war between Uganda and Rwanda."

However, when contacted, Brig. Kale Kaihura, the commander in charge of Congo operations in 2003 when Ugandan troops were in eastern DRC, said that Uganda never armed any factions in Ituri.

"There was a war going on and what we did was to help some Congolese movements to defend themselves against aggressors and, of course, we defended ourselves," he said.

He added: "Congo has been used as a battleground by foreign powers since the Belgians. If the Europeans want to understand the genesis of this, perhaps they could look a little closer to home. Was it Uganda that killed Congo's first democratically elected president [Patrice Lumumba]. No, it was the Americans. Does America even share a border with Congo?"

Efforts to get a response to the report from the Kigali government failed. Telephone calls last week to the Minister of Foreign Affairs went unanswered.