



The Story So Far: CHUM crisis deepens with another resignation



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Opinion: Canada should champion youth education in Rwanda

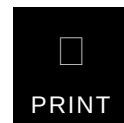
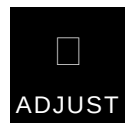
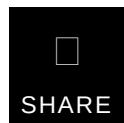


MOSES GASHIRABAKE, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE

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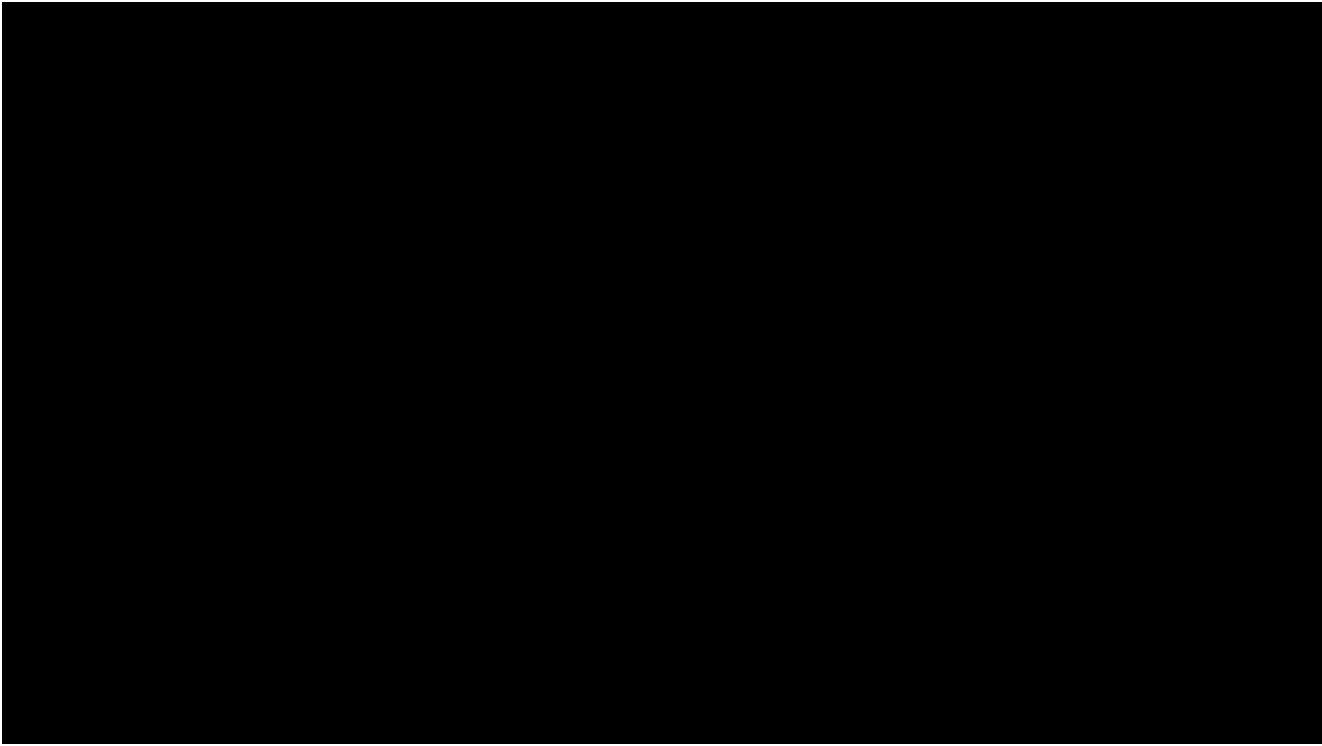
I had the rare privilege of meeting with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda this past winter break. My visit came after a 20-year absence following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi — unbelievable, right? The horrific images I saw as an innocent boy of 7 were replaced with beautiful warm smiles of welcome from the State, clean streets and an optimistic citizenry. Encouraging, right?

“Welcome to Rwanda, the land of 1000 hills,” displayed a gleaming LCD screen. One quickly notices how the super-organized, tech-enabled and spotless-clean Kigali International Airport gives Montreal’s Trudeau Airport a run for its money.

My arrival in Rwanda was laden with a mixture of sweet-sorrow emotions. Unpalatable images of 1994 came back fresh in my mind. I almost wept. Over the four weeks that followed, sombre images of my early childhood were in stark contrast to the vibrant, pluralistic scenes I witnessed across the country. Finally reunited with my motherland, my anguish was overpowered with contentment.

Following the 1994 Rwandan crisis, I spent 13 years growing up in Kenya as an undocumented stateless refugee. Efforts to acquire Kenyan citizenship never materialized. Luckily, Canada took me in about seven years ago. I am now a proud Canadian. My experiences in Canada have been very positive. This country has presented me with endless opportunities alongside quality post-secondary education in the last six years. For that, I am endlessly thankful.

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During my visit, I directly witnessed Rwanda’s progress. Today, Rwanda is as a shining example in many key development indicators. Economic growth in 2014 hit 7.8 per cent. Property rights are flourishing — over 6 million people (including women) have title deeds. Electricity availability is up by 40 per cent since 1994. More than 80 per cent of Rwandans now have health-care coverage. The country’s poverty rate has decreased, too, since 1994, from 60 per cent of the population to under 45 per cent. Homegrown solutions like the Gacaca courts, Girinka (“own a cow” program), Umuganda (“community service”), Ndi Umunyarwanda (“I am Rwandan”) and

others, thrive. Institutional performance in anti-corruption, over 60 per cent women parliamentarians, Imihigo or performance contracts are a norm — not an exception.

Unfortunately, quality post-secondary education still remains a challenge in Rwanda. Today, quality educational opportunities remain elusive to many young Rwandans. The situation becomes even trickier for the socio-economically disadvantaged.

With 70 per cent of Rwanda's 11.7 million people comprising of youth under the age of 30, the quality of post-secondary education is of vital importance. As Rwanda has constantly ranked best in development assistance optimization, it needs to be encouraged. Today, Rwanda's foreign aid accounts for 38 per cent of its GDP (down from over 65 per cent of its GDP after the 1994 Genocide). With sound investments, it is projected Rwanda can wean itself off aid in 50 years.

Quality post-secondary education will undoubtedly ensure Rwanda's growth agenda is sustained. The best way to support Rwanda now is to directly invest in educating its youth. Pressing needs include equipment costs, research and development, and hiring quality professors. With a booming information and communications technology sector, more investments in knowledge education would ensure Rwanda's growth remains top notch.

As part of the 2012 'Economic Action Plan,' Canada abruptly cut its bilateral development assistance to Rwanda. Some have commented that the Harper government's aid cut to Rwanda is synonymous to Canada's indifference during the 1994 slaughter of the Tutsi. This is something we Canadians need to reflect upon.

As a leader in international development and education, Canada needs to encourage Rwanda's impressive growth by supporting its post-secondary education. This year, whoever becomes Prime Minister must reconsider restoring the Canada-Rwanda bilateral assistance cooperation with a defined focus on youth education.

Moses Gashirabake holds a bachelor's degree (with honours) in political science from Concordia University. He is currently a candidate at McGill University's Faculty of Law in Montreal. Moses was one of the five Canadian youth delegates to the 2014 G20 Summit in Sydney, Australia where he advocated for Global Citizenship.

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Lucy Gaudio · ★ Top Commenter · Montreal, Quebec

According to Ret. Gen. Romeo Dallaire's book based on his experience as Commander of the UN operation in Rwanda, Canada's lack of involvement in the genocide was caused by lack of support and funding by the UN, specifically by the United States. Bill Clinton states the situation as the largest regret of his presidency. Despite that, I'm sure that the innocent Rwandans who had to live, or unfortunately die, during that period, didn't really care about politics so I agree with you. This is Canada's chance to do the right thing. When I read that book, I couldn't believe that the world would turn such a blind eye, despite UNAMIR'S cries for support. It's truly heartbreaking, and though they didn't do the right thing 20 years ago, they have the chance now.

Thanks for this piece.

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