



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

STATEMENT

BY

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AT

**THE BRIEFING TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ON THE STATUS
OF THE UGANDA-RWANDA RELATIONS**

17TH MAY 2019

INTRODUCTION

Your Excellencies,

I welcome you all to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to have interaction on matters of interest, particularly the state of Uganda's relations with Rwanda.

The Government of the Republic of Uganda has continued to pursue and espouse, consistent with our Constitution, the peaceful co-existence with all States, settlement of international disputes by peaceful means and promotion of regional economic and political co-operation and integration.

These principles guide our relations bilaterally, regionally and at the international level. Our priority in particular has been to strengthen relations with neighboring countries because we understand very well that our growth, security and prosperity has a beneficial impact on them and vice versa.

BACKGROUND

In recent weeks, there have been reports and statements made in respect to the relations with our sisterly country of Rwanda. Like with all countries, and our neighbors in particular, I wish to reiterate that Uganda, consistent with its principled approach, is committed to peaceful and friendly relations with Rwanda, on the basis of respect for each other and mutual benefit.

Rwanda is a neighboring country with which Uganda shares historical, cultural, economic and social ties. We are convinced that the current hitch in the state of our bilateral relations will be resolved. This meeting today comes against a backdrop of official statements that have been made by the Government of Uganda.

On 28th February 2019, the Government of Rwanda decided to close its Katuna border with Uganda. Katuna is a One Stop Border Post. The Government of Rwanda also issued an advisory against travel of its nationals to Uganda. Rwanda made allegations that Uganda was harassing

its (Rwanda) citizens and hosting elements hostile to the Government of Rwanda.

Subsequently, on 30th April 2019, while briefing Heads of Mission accredited to Rwanda, the Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs made similar allegations against Uganda.

CLOSURE OF THE KATUNA BORDER

The decision by Rwanda to close Katuna border, which is a One Stop Border Post, was unilateral, sudden and took the Government of Uganda by surprise. Rwanda diverted all traffic to Mirama Hills and Cyanika Customs Border Posts.

The sudden closure of Katuna border post led to congestion and delays at Cyanika and Mirama Hills, resulting into increase in the cost of doing business and loss of business, especially of perishable goods. The Uganda Government advised the Ugandan business community to take these challenges into account when making their business decisions.

The initial reason given by the Government of Rwanda for the closure was that they were going to carry out some repairs at the Katuna One Stop Border Post.

Whereas it is Rwanda's sovereign right to carry out the repairs, courtesy would have required them to inform the Government of Uganda in advance about the repairs that would impede travel between the two countries across an international border. This would have been consistent with the methods of work employed by the two countries sharing the One Stop Border Post.

Subsequently, it turned out that the reason for closing the border was actually not to carry out repairs, but the closure was due to "political reasons."

Government of Uganda has not restricted any movement of goods and people from Uganda into Rwanda. The movement of people from Uganda to Rwanda has continued normally. This is consistent with our regional and

international obligations. What has continued to exist are the restrictions on the movement of goods and Rwandan citizens from Rwanda to Uganda.

Export of Ugandan goods to Rwanda has been prohibited by Rwandan authorities. The same authorities have introduced an export permit system for people that intend to export goods to Uganda, which is practically impossible to obtain. I have previously described this as a trade embargo, which indeed it is.

ALLEGATIONS OF RESTRICTING BUSINESS WITH RWANDA

It is not true that Uganda has restricted business with Rwanda. On the contrary, Uganda has been a vocal advocate for regional integration and building closer connectivity in trade between us and our neighbours, including Rwanda. This is essential for our common prosperity. It is, therefore, unfortunate that the movement of goods and people across our common border has been restricted. This harms our economies and social interaction and also threatens our integration efforts under the East African Community, which we have all worked hard to build. Many of the people whose movement is being restricted have relatives found on either side of the border. Uganda is committed to addressing any trade related issues, because we are convinced that doing so strengthens our regional integration and also helps us integrate faster into the global economy.

With regard to the above allegations, I encourage those of you that can, to visit the border to see for yourselves the reality on the ground.

ALLEGED HOSTING OF ELEMENTS FIGHTING RWANDA

The Government of Rwanda has made a number of allegations which we have responded to through diplomatic channels but also through other mediums.

Firstly, there have been allegations by the Government of Rwanda that Uganda hosts elements of the Rwanda National Congress (RNC) and others fighting the Government of Rwanda. Uganda cannot allow its territory to be used to threaten the security of a neighbouring country. One of our key

foreign policy objectives is regional peace and security, cooperation and integration, which are promoted through our membership to regional organisations like EAC, ICGLR, IGAD and of course the African Union.

ALLEGATIONS OF ARREST, TORTURE AND HARASSMENT OF RWANDANS

Secondly, Rwanda has alleged illegal arrest, torture and harassment of Rwandans in Uganda. This also is totally false. Rwandans are welcome to visit Uganda. However, Uganda expects Rwandans who visit Uganda, just like any other visitors, to be law abiding. Anyone who breaks the law will be dealt with in accordance with the law. In this connection, several Rwandan nationals who have been arrested for breaking the law have either been charged in courts of law or deported back to Rwanda.

In addition, a number of Rwandan security operatives have been entering Uganda without following laid down procedures governing entry of security personnel into the country. A number of these, when apprehended, have been deported back to Rwanda.

As you are all aware, Uganda has been a target and victim of terrorist attacks, including assassinations of Moslem Sheiks and senior Government officials. The Government of Uganda, therefore, takes seriously its duty and obligation to protect the security of its citizens and its borders. Any local or foreign threats will continue to be dealt with decisively whenever and wherever they occur.

CONCLUSION

The Uganda Government has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to improve relations with Rwanda. I have had numerous contacts with my colleague the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Rwanda. I have traveled to Rwanda several times as a Special Envoy of H.E. the President, including recently for the commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Genocide against the Tutsi.

We have and will continue to address any issues raised by Rwanda but we will do it through diplomatic channels and not the press. It is in both our interests to do so. Our channels of communication remain open.

Finally, we are convinced that through these engagements, any issues will be addressed and normal relations restored for the mutual benefit of our two peoples and the region as a whole.

I thank you.