

Rwanda: Starvation in the Shadow of a Star. What is Kagame Trying to Hide?

By [Ann Garrison](#)

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Several brave souls have actually declared their intention to run against Rwandan President, aka Dictator, Paul Kagame in this year's election, even though two of the country's three viable candidates landed in prison last time and a third fled the country after his party's vice president was found by a riverbank with his head cut off.

This week the Rwandan government announced that all presidential candidates' social media messages—text, photos, and video—must be approved by the national electoral commission. Since the Rwandan government has long since assassinated or frightened any real journalists out of the country, this will severely hinder candidates' efforts to get their message out, even to the tiny percentage of the population who have both cell phones and electricity in their homes and the larger percentage who have cell phones but have to leave their homes—often walking miles—to charge them. Or to those of us outside Rwanda who might be trying to follow this year's election.

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A great deal, no doubt, but one word Kagame most certainly does not want broadcast or even tweeted to the world outside is "famine." That word might embarrass both him and his powerful friends Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Howard Buffett, and Reverend Rick Warren, all longtime champions of his so-called economic miracle.



Bill Clinton and Paul Kagame in Rwanda

Bill Clinton and Howard Buffett aren't likely to be pleased by reports that their agricultural aid to Rwanda is helping starve rather than uplift Rwandans, so would they want Rwandan presidential candidates to have the freedom to tweet "Rwandan famine" or related images?

Clinton has said that he is willing to tolerate some of the Rwandan government's failings in the area of human rights because, "They have achieved so much," and "Nothing's perfect."

Indeed. A recent investigation published by London-based Global Campaign for Rwandans' Human Rights reports that

"since November 2015 more than three million Rwandans [a quarter of the population] are at the verge of starvation and more than 150,000 Rwandans have emigrated out of the country, mostly to Uganda, due to a ravaging famine, particularly in the Eastern Province Districts of Rwamagana, Nyagatare, Bugesera, Kayonza and Kirehe as well as Nyanza and Gisagara Districts in Southern Province."



Source: The Organization for World Peace

And something else is wrong with this picture. Two of the famine stricken districts of Eastern Province—Kayonza and Kirehe—are among the three districts that the Clinton Development Initiative (CDI) boasts of helping in its publication "Anchor Farm Project: Rwanda."

"CDI focuses its smallholder outreach operations in Rwanda's Eastern Province—in the Kirehe, Gatsibo, and Kayonza districts—where they have an established network of field officers, government agricultural workers, and more than 35,000 farmers benefiting from agricultural extension services during the 2016-2017 seasons. CDI's work will focus on the effectiveness of its

farmer extension programs. The core focus of these programs will be on integrated soil fertility management, predominantly for a soy-maize rotation; access to quality and reliable seeds, inputs and input finance; climate resilience and erosion control; and working directly with large buyers to secure the best price. The Clinton Hunter Development Initiative (CHDI), which is a partnership between the Clinton Foundation and The Hunter Foundation of Scotland, established and operates the agroprocessing business Mount Meru Soyco LTD. Soyco, which produces cooking oil for the local Rwandan market, provides a market opportunity for CDI smallholder farmers.”

And damn if there isn’t another problem here. This Hunter-Clinton Foundation agro-processing partnership—Mount Meru Soyco LTD—in the now famine stricken district of Kayonza—appears to have been a source of “reputational” anxiety for Clinton Foundation staff and for John Podesta. Podesta is of course former Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton; former CEO, now Chair and Counsel for the Center for American Progress; former Counselor to Barack Obama; former Chair of the Obama-Biden Transition Team; co-owner of the Podesta Group, a major lobbying firm; and perhaps most infamously, campaign manager for Hillary Clinton’s ill-fated 2016 presidential run.

These 2012 e-mails released by Wikileaks in the Podesta e-mails expressed concern that former President Clinton might be held responsible for whatever Mount Meru Soyco LTD gets up to:

“Re: Rwanda concern

From: blindsey@clintonfoundation.org
To: adesai@clintonfoundation.org
CC: zshaikley@clintonfoundation.org, wmorris@clintonfoundation.org,
lgraham@clintonfoundation.org, doug@presidentclinton.com,
justin@presidentclinton.com john.podesta@gmail.com
Date: 2012-02-21 22:05
Subject: Re: Rwanda concern

Tom Hunter sent an email to WJC [William Jefferson Clinton] recently saying he hoped to be in a position to re-engage thru CHDI [Clinton Hunter Development Initiative] in Rwanda in the not too distant future. Announcing that our job in Rwanda is done and we are withdrawing would end that possibility. Ewan Hunter sits on the Board of both Soyco and Rwanda Coffee. To the extent that he is identified with CHDI and not the Hunter Foundation, the reputational issues, at least as far as the public is concerned, would still exist even after our “announcement.” The government would understand the distinction, however.

From: Amitabh Desai
To: Bruce Lindsey
Cc: Zayneb Shaikley; Walker Morris; Laura Graham; Doug Band - PC; Justin Cooper - PC; John Podesta
Sent: Tue Feb 21 17:03:02 2012
Subject: Rwanda concern

Dear Bruce, Laura, and Doug, the note below requests your guidance regarding CHDI in Rwanda. We’d welcome your feedback and would be happy to discuss this further at your convenience. Sincerely, Ami and Walker

THE CHALLENGE: The Rwandan public and government associate Soyco and Rwandan Farmers with WJC, but we have little or no operational input or

control of those programs. This presents reputational risks – for example next year if Soyco is accused of unjust labor practices, or an accident/fatality occurs at the factory, or if the farmers complain the factory isn't paying them fair prices, etc, there is a risk that WJC is held responsible, albeit unfairly."

What follows—all of which can be read in Podesta e-mail 15436—is a review of five options for managing “reputational risks.” One is recommended because it “would enable WJC to say rightfully that we have ongoing agriculture programs in Rwanda” and “provide an opportunity to engage donors who approach us with an interest in Rwanda.”

Fast forward to 2017, and Rwanda’s Eastern Province’s Kayonza District—home of agro-processing facility Mount Meru Soyco LTD— faces famine and mass migration north to Uganda, which already hosts millions of refugees moving south to escape war and famine in South Sudan.

At the same time Rwandan President Paul Kagame continues to take one star turn after another on the world stage. He is Israel’s African darling and he has just accepted the Dr. Miriam and Sheldon Adelson Award for Outstanding Friendship with the Jewish People at the Champions of Jewish Values Gala in NYC. He is fêted by elite American universities and business schools including Yale, Harvard, Stanford and the Wharton School, who present him as a transformative leader and echo Bill Clinton’s rhapsodic claim that “the economic and social gains in Rwanda have been nothing short of astonishing under Kagame.” The Rwandan president even co-chairs the UN Millenium Development Goals Advocacy Group with Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg.

Yet despite all this international star power, Kagame so fears even the tweets of domestic rivals that he commands his electoral commission to censor them. “Rwanda Genocide” is one term that will not make it past his censors; “Genocide against the Tutsi” is the legally codified and enforced description of Rwanda’s 1994 tragedy inside Rwanda.

Another word that his rivals won’t be allowed to tweet is “famine,” even as a quarter of his people face desperate hunger.

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