

# **“The Ideology that Brings us Closer to the People is the Secret to Our Liberation”**

*The annual national symposium of the Rwanda Defence Command and Staff College took place 12–14 May 2021. Major Gen. Mugambage was one of the panellists on the subject of “National Inter-agency Collaboration and Coordination Mechanisms for Sustainable Peace, Security and Development.” Pan African Review (PAR) captured some of the main issues he raised in relation to security and liberation. PAR later met up with him to clarify and elaborate on some of the views he had raised on the panel.*

## **On the meaning of liberation**

RPF’s Liberation is about the liberation of Rwandans from poor leadership to a dignified life. Gen. Mugambage summarised President Kagame’s speech on the 20th Genocide Commemoration, which emphasised that Rwanda’s modest success can be attributed to three factors: the unity of the people; transparency and accountability, and getting out of the box in order to ‘think big’ as we seek solutions to the challenges our people face. We asked ourselves, ‘Yes, we are engaged in this, but what do we want to achieve?’ We had to envision what we could achieve during our time and what we would leave behind when we are no longer there; it’s not just about looking at the ‘now.’ It’s about looking far and beyond.

It is by remaining focused on this vision that explains how Rwanda got out of the status of a failed state to the point that others begin to look up to Rwanda as a model or even get inspired by us. But it is about an ideology that brings us closer to the people: being able to partner with them in

delivering a sustainable and secure environment for socioeconomic transformation is the secret to our liberation.

### **On the link between security, welfare, dignity**

One of the seven original major objectives of the RPF was to provide security for all Rwandans. Another is to restore dignity and welfare to all Rwandans. The two are related because combining the two means understanding security broadly. When this is done, you quickly understand that it requires a multisectoral approach; otherwise, you can't be successful fighting the multidimensional aspects of security. The moment you understand this, collaboration becomes a clear necessity. We understood right from the word go that the people are the primary beneficiaries of a good security environment and that, to achieve it, you cannot forget their involvement (the community) in the production of security. We have worked together with the community to produce the security we enjoy today.

### **On why the army and police are among the most trusted institutions in Rwanda**

Public perception of the security forces is important insofar as the security of the country is concerned. If there's poor perception, even a small threat will escalate into big problems. Therefore, when public perception goes down, insecurity goes up. When you have a positive perception, insecurity goes down. People used to be scared of armed forces because they used to harass and kill them. But today, as an institution, we donate blood and other medical supplies, houses and other material support to vulnerable people. When we do such work, it shows we are ready to give our lives to the people. All these are critical in the context of the doctrine and ideology.



## **On winning the trust of the people**

Part of our doctrine, since the days of the RPA, is to ensure that the perception of the security organs is positive, and you achieve this when you collaborate with other institutions and communities and when you deliver. Take the example of the insurgency in the northern region after the war and the genocide in 1994. It was defeated by a population that had changed its perception of the security forces because of their conduct towards the people. The community people shifted from being hostile and began to provide information that helped us to defeat the insurgency. Because of our doctrine, we know that political and community mobilisation must be in place for anything else to work. Delivering also matters. It's visionary leadership that delivers. We are operating from an environment that offers a clear definition and execution of strategic objectives while winning the hearts and minds of the people and reassuring them about their future.

## **On the culture of solving problems**

The RPA was involved in solving problems. It was doing everything. Because institutions were totally destroyed, the RPA had to do everything from running the military to administration, justice, health, etc. It was the only institution around, as it were. We didn't necessarily have the

skills for those tasks, but because of this ideology, we could fill the gap quickly. We were solving problems, most importantly. But with time, these solutions were institutionalised. An example of how these duties became institutionalised is the Rwanda National Police that came into force in 2000. The leadership saw a problem with the gendarmerie that was in place and said, "We must build civil police." I am grateful that the president deployed me as the first Inspector General of Police (IGP). I took that opportunity, together with my colleagues, to build the new force from the Gendarmerie, Police Communale and Police Judiciaire. We had to build one force with a clear ideology and doctrine. I had not been a policeman. But we knew we had to build a law enforcement agency that the people would trust. We did this to overcome the negative perception associated with these three organs that we had inherited. Today, the people in Sudan and other countries where our forces are deployed say that our police go above and beyond law enforcement. They provide conditions for lasting security.

### **On inter-agency collaboration and a sense of common purpose**

It is about different agencies working together for a common goal of providing solutions to the problems our people face. By tracking security challenges and finding solutions to them, inter-agency collaboration is do or die. Such collaborations provide the resources and capabilities, and involve the community. Without this approach, you suffer consequences. And because this approach has worked for us, cooperation keeps growing; for instance, in the security sector, joint training is becoming a reality. The mandate of the RDF, RNP and RIB is the same: to provide an environment for securing people and their property, and provide their socioeconomic needs. The only difference is how we do it: the unique specialisations we bring to the mandate. Then we support each other through joint training, joint operations and information sharing.

### **On ensuring problems are solved holistically**

Our cooperation is not just with security institutions. Not at all. We started there, but we have increasingly been applying multi-sector approaches to problems. The model village project is a good example. We know that it needs all basic amenities: formal and TVET schools, health centres, water and electricity utilities, etc. So, every aspect of life is looked at in an integrated way the model villages are being built. As you can imagine, the ministries of health, infrastructure, education, army and police, all come together under the multisectoral approach. To make that work efficiently, we have an inter-ministerial steering committee set up to identify needs (hospitals, schools, water, etc.) and then together come up with sustainable solutions. They must keep cost low, maintain quality and deliver efficiently. But in all this, leadership is key. We are blessed with a great leader who ensures good policy formulation as well as implementation.

### **How inter-agency cooperation avoids competition**

It is not as easy as it might seem, but it is possible because it comes from the ideological understanding that the people and parties involved have. You should not be concerned about how easy or difficult it is; if it's a collective decision, go for it.

**PAR:** But Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International might want to work with you in the spirit of inter-agency collaboration, and the involvement of the people in the security process might be considered militarisation of society and authoritarianism at work. What do you have to say about that?

**Gen. Mugabage:** It's not about labels; it's about what the military does when it is with its people. In the past, the military used to go to the people to kill them; now we go there to work together to address their basic needs, to give them blood. If you call that militarisation, then I can't help you.

*This article was extracted from the African liberation special issue magazine that's currently on the stands, and to which you can subscribe by following the indications [here](#) or using the Paypal button below:*

