

November 2, 2007

His Excellency Paul Kagame
President of Rwanda

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for meeting with me and Professor Radicella towards the end of the ICT Summit. I reiterate my compliments for your personal leadership and admiration for the directions in which you are taking your country.

Perhaps like some others, I, too, visited the Genocide Museum and was deeply touched by it. While the past cannot change its course, it often offers credible lessons for the future. I need not stress that Rwanda's future depends a great deal on how it rebounds from its extraordinary trauma of recent years.

For the slogan "never again" to mean something concrete, the key is the creation of a strong voice for the intelligentsia of the country. For this, the country needs to develop a base of liberal education through which the best minds can expand fearlessly without anxiety. As said in the preamble to the UNESCO constitution, wars begin in the minds of men, so it is in the minds of men (and women) that the defenses of peace must be constructed. It is the creation of men and women whose role is to be beacons of truth and the destruction of prejudice in society that is the central purpose of liberal education. I am thus advocating the creation of a university in Rwanda whose role is to create knowledge in all fields of human endeavor and offer first-rate liberal education — as Harvard and Yale do in the US, and Cambridge and Oxford do in the UK.

I have only a peripheral understanding of the universities in Rwanda. Perhaps one of the existing universities can be brought up to the needed level. Perhaps it is necessary to create a new one. Perhaps one can create, within an existing university, a high-level Institute for Advanced Study which may serve this goal in part. While the precise shape of the effort needs further study, I feel certain that the long-term well-being of Rwanda demands it. I was myself a professor at Yale for some twenty-two years and know well what a great university can do.

Nothing here will come as news to you but I took the liberty to articulate it — especially now that your country is engaged in reconstruction efforts through science and technology. Indeed, as a scientist myself, I am deeply impressed by Rwanda's commitment to science and technology, but this merely strengthens my point.

If you consider this suggestion worthy of attention, I will be pleased to do what I can personally and also through the many institutions in Trieste and elsewhere.

With my kindest regards, and many thanks again for your hospitality,

Sincerely yours,

K.R. Sreenivasan
Abdus Salam Research Professor
Director, ICTP