**11 February 2016**

**From the European Association of Jehovah’s Christian Witnesses**

**Complementary Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee subsequent to the adoption of the List of Issues**

**Fourth periodic report pursuant to article 40 of the Covenant**

**Rwanda**

**(116th Session of the Human Rights Committee, 7 – 24 March 2016)**

Contact address in Belgium: Rue d'Argile 60, 1950 Kraainem

Tel.: ++ 32-2-782 00 15 - Fax: ++ 32-2-782 08 11 - E-mail: jwitnesses.be@jw.org

*Contact in New York: Philip Brumley, General Counsel for Jehovah’s Witnesses: ++ 845 306 0711*

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| SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION This complementary submission to the Human Rights Committee on Rwanda highlights violations of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”) subsequent to the adoptionof the *List of issues taken up in connection with the consideration of the 4th periodic report of the Rwanda* (CCPR/C/RWA/Q/4).  The European Association of Jehovah’s Christian Witnesses (EAJCW) noted with great appreciation that the Human Rights Committee requested that Rwanda comment on guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religious belief. |

# I. Observations on the *List of Issues* in relation to the fourth periodic report of Rwanda (CCPR/C/RWA/Q/4) and related *Reply to the List of Issues* (CCPR/C/RWA/Q/4/Add.1)

* 1. In its *List of Issues* (CCPR/C/RWA/Q/4 para. 19) adopted in connection with the consideration of the fourth report of Rwanda, the Committee requested that Rwanda comment on reports that Jehovah’s Witnesses have been expelled from schools or dismissed from their jobs on the basis of their conscientious objection to singing the national anthem, participating in religious ceremonies in schools, paying church taxes or taking an oath while holding the national flag. The Committee also requested Rwanda to provide a report on the progress made in guaranteeing conscientious objectors the opportunity to perform alternative civilian service in lieu of military service.
  2. The Rwandan authorities failed to comment on these issues in their *Reply to the List of Issues*, and ignored the recommendations made by the Committee.

# II. Update on ongoing violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”) – Articles 18, 19, 24, 26 and 27)

1. **School children compelled to participate in activities violating freedoms of conscience and religion.**
   1. On 15 September 2015, 17-year-old Niyomukiza Jacqueline and 16-year-old Ingabire Olive, both Jehovah’s Witnesses, were dismissed from the school of Groupe Scolaire de Saint Martin Muringa. This school is located in Muringa Sector, Nyabihu District. The students were dismissed for refusing to attend mass at a Catholic Church. On 2 October 2015, their parents sent a protest letter to the school’s headmaster and to the Executive Secretary of Muringa Sector. The headmaster readmitted the students on 8 October 2015.
   2. At the beginning of 2015, the headmaster of Groupe Scolaire Vuganyana, a secondary school located in Karongi District, refused to give 30 Witness students their school reports because they refused to pay contributions towards the construction of a church, for the charity organization of the Catholic Church (Caritas), and for a Catholic children’s magazine. In May 2015, several parents wrote a protest letter to the school authorities, without success. In November 2015, Jehovah’s Witnesses officially wrote to the director and the president of the Council of Education of the district about this situation. Since then, the headmaster of Groupe Scolaire Vuganyana progressively delivers the school reports to the students.
2. **Arbitrary dismissal from work for conscientious objection to participating in oath ceremonies.**
   1. The Rwandan authorities planned to organize solidarity camps for nursery, primary, and secondary school teachers at the end of 2015, and later postponed them until 2016. These solidarity camps include military training and seminars on patriotism.
   2. Jehovah’s Witnesses conscientiously object to participating in military training and patriotic seminars. As many as 500 Jehovah’s Witnesses could lose their jobs for not attending this training, as was the case in 2008 and 2009 when more than 200 teachers, who are Jehovah’s Witnesses, were dismissed and blacklisted for the same reason.
   3. On 11 November 2015, the Ministry of Education wrote to the headmasters of primary and secondary schools, public or government subsided, all over the country asking all teachers to take an oath. As a first consequence, on 10 January 2016, school teachers from the Ngoma District in Eastern Province were invited to a meeting and were told that they had to take a patriotic oath while holding the national flag. At the meeting, the director invited Jehovah’s Witnesses to publicly identify themselves, and then invited them to have a conversation in a separate room. He then informed them that he knew of their position on taking the oath and that they should choose between being dismissed and resigning from their work. He gave them two days to let him know of their decision. The teachers are steadfast in their conscientious stand not to take part in the oath ceremony. They find this objectionable to their religious beliefs. They also do not want to freely resign from their work, which they consider a precious privilege. To date, the director has not informed them of when they will be dismissed.
   4. When Jehovah’s Witnesses are dismissed from their employment, their prospects are dim. They are blacklisted from public service for an indefinite period of time and can only be removed from this list if after seven years; they make a request of rehabilitation which must be accepted. When they appeal to the judicial system, the Rwandan courts routinely rule against them, leaving them with no recourse. Currently, 32 of Jehovah’s Witnesses have been dismissed from their employment and 21 are involved in 15 court cases at various levels of the judicial system.
   5. This number will increase significantly if Rwandan authorities continue their blatant disregard for the right of conscientious objection. The consequences of Rwanda’s religious discrimination are real; individuals are deprived of the employment for which they were trained, leaving them and their families to search for lower-paying work.
3. **Difficulties for couples who are Jehovah’s Witnesses to marry without taking an oath while touching the national flag.**

10. From January to April 2015, 72 couples who are Jehovah’s Witnesses faced difficulties to marry because of their refusal to touch the national flag while taking the marriage oath. An official report dated 25 January 2016, validated by a bailiff reveals that a total of 770 couples were concerned from 2011 to April 2015.

# III. Conclusions and Recommendations

11. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Rwanda, and worldwide, restate the concerns conveyed in their initial submission in their entirety (please see initial submission of EAJCW). It is their hope that Rwanda takes positive steps to stop human rights violations against all peaceful citizens, including Jehovah’s Witnesses.