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Anti-Tutsi Hate Speech by DRC Army Spokesperson and its Implications for the Washington Peace Accords And Beyond Analysis Report



December 31, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On December 27, 2025, just twenty-three days after Presidents Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Paul Kagame of neighboring Rwanda signed the December Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity in the Great Lakes Region, spokesperson for the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), Major General Sylvain Ekenge delivered a televised address that constituted genocidal hate speech targeting the Tutsi community. Ekenge, who appeared on state broadcaster Radio-Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC), warned Congolese men against marrying Tutsi women¹. He characterized them as instruments of infiltration used to maintain ethnic superiority. The remarks, which appeared to have been prepared and read from notes, were actively reinforced by the television host, suggesting institutional coordination rather than individual misconduct.

The DRC government responded swiftly to international outrage by suspending both Ekenge and the television host on **December 29**, issuing statements condemning the remarks as contrary to DRC's values and claiming they did not reflect the official position of the government.

This report will therefore examine the incident in detail, analyze reactions from key stakeholders, assesses the adequacy of the government's response, maps the hate speech against established genocide prevention frameworks, and explores implications for the fragile peace process. The central argument is that while the suspension may satisfy immediate international concerns, it fails to address institutionalized anti-Tutsi discrimination that threatens both civilian protection and the viability of the Washington Accords. Without concrete systemic reforms, the peace agreement risks becoming yet another failed diplomatic initiative, with devastating consequences for millions of civilians in eastern DRC.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The Washington Accords Framework

The Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity brokered by Donald's Trump administration represent the culmination of months of intensive U.S. and Qatari-mediated negotiations to end decades of conflict in eastern DRC. Formally signed by Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame, the agreement builds on several preceding frameworks. These include the June 27, 2025 peace agreement signed by DRC's and Rwandan foreign ministers, the November 7, 2025 Regional Economic Integration Framework focused on critical minerals cooperation, the April 25, 2025 Declaration of Principles establishing a pathway to peace and stability, and critically, the October 31, 2024 Concept of Operations (CONOPS) developed under the Luanda Process for neutralizing the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)², a DRC-based radical Hutu militia responsible for sporadic attacks in Rwanda and linked to the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi Rwandan, and facilitating Rwandan force disengagement from eastern DRC.

At its core, the Washington Accords commit both parties to mutual respect for territorial integrity and cessation of hostilities, particularly following the seizure of strategic cities, supply lines, and key mines by the March 23 (M23) rebel group. The parties agreed to implement the Harmonized Plan for the Neutralization of the FDLR, which Rwanda perceives as a key security threat within the same timeframe, and Disengagement of Forces/Lifting of Defensive Measures by Rwanda. The agreement established a joint security coordination mechanism to be operational within thirty days of signing, with shared operating procedures and reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency. Perhaps most relevant to the Ekenge incident, the CONOPS explicitly requires an end to hate speech and verbal attacks, while the broader agreement commits both parties to protect all citizens without distinction and to promote full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

¹ A tribe/social group in Africa's Great Lakes region, primarily based in Rwanda and Burundi, with communities in eastern DRC and Uganda and Burundi, with communities in eastern DRC and Uganda - who were the primary targets of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi and continue to face targeted violence in parts of eastern DRC

² FDLR stands for the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda), an armed Hutu rebel group formed in 2000 in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from remnants of forces involved in the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, aiming to overthrow the Tutsi-led Rwandan government, and has committed serious violations of international law involving the targeting of women and children in armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, and forced displacement

The economic dimension of the accords is substantial, linking peace to regional prosperity through the Regional Economic Integration Framework. This component aims to attract Western investment to the mineral-rich Great Lakes region, with cooperation on critical minerals trade, energy infrastructure, and cross-border economic development. The Trump administration framed the agreement as necessary to secure U.S. interests in establishing critical mineral supply chains independent of China, although the peace agreement itself mentions minerals only once, with economic integration reserved for separate bilateral agreements signed concurrently.

Historical Context of Anti-Tutsi Discrimination

The eastern DRC has experienced persistent instability since the influx of refugees from Rwanda's 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The region has been affected by multiple conflicts over three decades involving more than 120 armed groups, creating what the United Nations (UN) describes as one of the most protracted, complex, and serious humanitarian crises on earth. Within this volatile context, Congolese Tutsis, particularly the Banyamulenge community in South Kivu, have faced systematic discrimination and violence that critics argue has become institutionalized under successive governments.

This discrimination manifests in multiple forms. Congolese Tutsis are routinely labeled as foreigners or Rwandan agents to legitimize violence and crimes against them, despite many families having lived in the DRC for generations. State-supported Wazalendo militias have continued to target Tutsi communities, forcing families off ancestral lands through violence and intimidation. The integration of FDLR elements, a group that includes perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda, into FARDC structures has created security threats for Tutsi populations who fear these forces. Propaganda characterizing Tutsis as alien threats has been amplified through various channels, with some purveyors of such rhetoric receiving and being legitimized at the Presidential Palace.

The DRC government has not consistently opposed anti-Tutsi discrimination, making the Ekenge incident a reflection of deeper institutional tolerance rather than a contradiction of its stated policy. The absence of presidential leadership in condemning discriminatory rhetoric or taking concrete action to protect Tutsi communities has created a permissive environment in which hate speech can flourish through official channels. The state television broadcast of genocidal rhetoric by Ekenge occurred within this context of governmental silence on discrimination, suggesting that such messaging may align with rather than contradict the regime's approach to Tutsi populations. This makes the incident particularly concerning, as it reflects not a rogue actor violating official policy, but the statements of a spokesperson operating within the parameters of what state institutions should consider acceptable discourse.

THE CURRENT CONFLICT DYNAMICS

The current phase of the conflict began in 2022 with the resurgence of the (M23) rebel group after years of dormancy following the 2012-2013 rebellion. M23 has stated that it represents Congolese Tutsi communities facing systematic discrimination and violence from the DRC government and allied militias. In early 2025, M23 launched a devastating offensive that captured major cities, including Goma and Bukavu, the provincial capitals of North and South Kivu. This represented the largest escalation since M23 briefly occupied Goma in 2012, with some analysts comparing its scope to that of the First and Second Congo Wars of the 1990s and early 2000s.

The offensive has caused massive civilian displacement, with close to one million people uprooted from their homes in 2025 alone. At least seven thousand people were killed in the fighting this year, with countless others subjected to sexual violence, forced recruitment, and other grave human rights violations. The humanitarian crisis has overwhelmed response capacity, with Doctors Without Borders and other aid organizations struggling to assist in the ongoing violence. The conflict has exposed the DRC government's inability or unwillingness to protect all its citizens equally, particularly Tutsi communities who have faced targeted violence from state-supported militias.

M23 justifies its armed insurgency by citing the need to protect Congolese Tutsi populations from systematic discrimination, violence, and the presence of FDLR elements within DRC security forces. The group has demanded political dialogue, security guarantees for Tutsi communities, and accountability for discrimination. The DRC government, for its part, characterizes M23 as a terrorist organization and denies

systematic discrimination against Tutsi populations, instead framing the conflict as external aggression. This fundamental disagreement over the nature of the conflict and the legitimacy of grievances has made genuine peace agreements difficult to achieve and sustain, as each side regards the other's positions as illegitimate.

DETAILS AND ANALYSIS OF THE INCIDENT

Ekenge's appearance on the RTNC state broadcaster is considered to be one of the most consequential interviews in the brief history of the Washington Accords. The interview was not a spontaneous appearance but rather a planned broadcast, with Ekenge visibly reading from prepared notes throughout the segment. This detail is significant because it indicates premeditation and suggests that the remarks were carefully crafted rather than representing an emotional outburst or improvised commentary.

The content of Ekenge's remarks constituted what appears to be clear hate speech targeting Tutsi women specifically and the broader Tutsi community. He characterized marriages to Tutsi women as dangerous infiltration strategies. According to Ekenge, when a Congolese man marries a Tutsi woman, he will receive, at his home, a member of her family presented as a cousin or nephew, who will, in fact, come to have children with the wife in the household. The children, Ekenge claimed, will be told they are born Tutsi because the Tutsi ethnic group is superior to other ethnicities. This narrative frames Tutsi women as deceptive agents of a conspiracy to maintain racial dominance through demographic manipulation, echoing some of the most dangerous propaganda from pre-genocide Rwanda.

Ekenge's remarks extended beyond targeting Tutsi women to deploy broader ideological frameworks rooted in colonial-era racial theories. He characterized Tutsis as Nilotics who conquered Rwanda and subjugated Hutus, appropriating their Bantu language, Kinyarwanda. This invocation of colonial anthropology, which falsely categorized African ethnic groups into racial hierarchies based on supposed origins and physical characteristics, has historically been used to justify discrimination and violence. Ekenge reinforced narratives that delegitimized Tutsi citizenship and presence in the Great Lakes region by framing Tutsis as foreign conquerors rather than indigenous Rwandans.

Critically, the television host actively reinforced these messages rather than challenging them. Oscar Mbal Kahij, who serves as senior editorial manager at RTNC and regularly reads presidential announcements, created a call-and-response dynamic that normalized hate speech. At one point, Kahij interjected to ask whether Ekenge was saying that Rwandans are capable of everything, specifically referencing *ubwenge*³, which he characterized as instilling lies, perfidy, unrest, and disengagement from an early age. Ekenge enthusiastically affirmed this framing, stating that Rwanda is indeed able to destabilize the country through such methods. This interaction transformed the broadcast from a monologue into a collaborative performance of hate speech, with both the military spokesperson and the state media representative reinforcing dangerous narratives.

Evidence of Orchestration

The circumstances surrounding the broadcast raised serious questions about whether this was an individual acting independently or part of a more systematic process. As the official spokesperson for FARDC, Ekenge operates within a tightly controlled hierarchy that reports directly to President Tshisekedi, the Supreme Commander of the FARDC. Appearing on state television to make official statements requires extensive logistical coordination, scheduling approval from military superiors, suggesting that such an appearance could not occur without any institutional knowledge.

The role of RTNC as the platform for these remarks adds another layer of institutional involvement. RTNC is not an independent broadcaster but the government's flagship state television network. The host who facilitated the interview, Kahij, who holds the senior editorial position and is considered a trusted voice of state authority, makes his active reinforcement of Ekenge's hate speech particularly significant. The collaborative dynamic between the spokesperson and the host, with Kahij prompting and elaborating on Ekenge's themes rather than challenging them, suggests coordination and reiteration rather than a spontaneous conversation.

³ *Ubwenge* is a Kinyarwanda word meaning wisdom, intelligence, knowledge, and insight, encompassing the ability to make sound judgments, understand complex situations, and apply knowledge effectively, often combining intellect with emotional depth and practicality. <https://x.com/DrDamascene/status/2005588795417059407>

Video footage of the broadcast provides additional evidence of preparation. Ekenge repeatedly glances down at his notes to ensure his message aligns with the prepared text. This contradicts narratives that might frame the incident as an emotional outburst or improvised commentary under pressure. The remarks were scripted, rehearsed, and delivered according to a typical newsroom plan before one goes live in the studio. Some analysts argue that the broadcast was a deliberate strategy to signal to domestic constituencies that, despite international peace agreements, anti-Tutsi policies remain in operation within state institutions. And this is through mobilizing nationalist sentiment, reinforcing narratives about Tutsi threats, and testing international response thresholds, by broadcasting the message widely without anticipating that there would be any consequences.

The timing of the broadcast strengthens arguments for orchestration. Occurring just three weeks after signing the Washington Accords, during the critical early implementation phase when joint mechanisms were supposed to be established, the incident directly undermines the provisions of the peace agreement. If this were truly an unauthorized action by an individual contrary to government policy, one might expect it to occur during periods of lower international scrutiny. Instead, it happened precisely when the government faced maximum pressure to demonstrate political will to begin implementing the measures stated within the Accords.

MAPPING EKENGE'S STATEMENTS AGAINST THE TEN STAGES OF GENOCIDE

The Ten Stages of Genocide framework by the scholar Dr. Gregory Stanton's provides a systematic analytical tool for recognizing and responding to genocidal processes before mass violence occurs. The framework identifies predictable patterns in societies moving toward genocide, enabling early intervention when warning signs appear. Analyzing Ekenge's broadcast through this framework reveals that his rhetoric exhibits characteristics of at least seven of the ten stages, indicating an advanced level of genocidal ideology being promoted through official state channels. This analysis demonstrates that the incident represents far more than offensive speech; it constitutes active progression along a continuum that historically has culminated in mass atrocities.

Stage One: Classification

Classification involves dividing people into categories of "us versus them" based on ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality. Ekenge's rhetoric fundamentally rests on a rigid classification of Tutsis as a distinct and separate category from other Congolese tribes. His invocation of colonial-era theories characterizing Tutsis as Nilotics who conquered Rwanda represents explicit racial classification. In describing Tutsis as foreign conquerors who appropriated the Bantu language Kinyarwanda, Ekenge reinforces a classification that denies Tutsi indigeneity and constructs them as inherently alien to the Great Lakes region. This classification extends to Congolese Tutsis despite their citizenship, framing them as extensions of a foreign Rwandan entity rather than legitimate members of the Congolese nation.

The broadcast's focus on warning Congolese men against marrying Tutsi women further reinforces classification by treating intermarriage as crossing a dangerous boundary rather than a normal expression of shared national identity. This framing suggests that Tutsi and non-Tutsi Congolese belong to fundamentally incomparable categories, with mixing between them representing infiltration rather than integration. The classification is made more insidious by characterizing it in pseudoscientific racial terms, invoking colonial anthropology that classified populations based on supposed physical and cultural characteristics.

This gives the classification a veneer of objective fact rather than political construction.

Stage Two: Symbolization

Symbolization associates names or symbols with classified groups, creating markers that facilitate identification and targeting. While Ekenge's broadcast did not introduce new symbols, it reinforced existing symbolic associations that mark Tutsis for discrimination. The term "Tutsi" itself functions as a symbol in the Great Lakes context, carrying connotations of foreign origin, elite status, and alleged conspiracy. Ekenge's deployment of the concept of *ubwenge*, characterized as a uniquely Tutsi trait of cunning, deception, and strategic thinking, creates symbolic association between Tutsi identity and inherent untrustworthiness.

The symbolization extends to Tutsi women specifically, who are marked through Ekenge's rhetoric as vectors of infiltration and demographic conquest. This gendered symbolization is particularly dangerous because it targets intimate family relationships and reproduction itself. By characterizing Tutsi women as agents whose children serve strategic purposes of racial dominance, Ekenge creates symbolic associations that can trigger violence against women, children, and families. The symbolization also applies to interethnic marriages, which are marked as sites of infiltration requiring vigilance rather than expressions of national unity. These symbolic associations make it easier to identify, isolate, and potentially target Tutsi individuals and families in mixed communities.

Stage Three: Discrimination

Discrimination involves using law, custom, or political power to deny rights of targeted groups. While Ekenge's broadcast did not announce new discriminatory laws, it reinforced and legitimized existing discriminatory practices through the authority of a state institution. It is in broadcasting these views through the army spokesperson on state television that the message carries implicit official sanction even if formal policy claims otherwise. The warnings against intermarriage, if heeded, would constitute discrimination in marriage and family formation. The characterization of Tutsis as infiltrators provides justification for discriminatory treatment in employment, housing, education, and political participation.

The broadcast occurs within a broader context of discrimination against Congolese Tutsis that includes denial of citizenship documentation, exclusion from land ownership, barriers to political participation, and targeting by state-supported militias. Ekenge's rhetoric does not create this discrimination but reinforces it by providing ideological justification through official channels. The effect is to normalize discriminatory treatment by framing it as legitimate self-defense against supposed Tutsi infiltration and domination strategies. This normalization makes discrimination more acceptable to broader populations who might otherwise question or resist such treatment of fellow citizens.

Stage Four: Dehumanization

Dehumanization involves denying the humanity of targeted groups, often by equating them with animals, insects, or diseases. Ekenge's rhetoric, while not using explicit dehumanizing language like calling Tutsis cockroaches or snakes, achieves dehumanization through different mechanisms. Through characterizing Tutsi women as instruments of infiltration rather than individuals with agency, autonomy, and humanity, Ekenge reduces them to tools of a collective conspiracy. The claim that hidden relatives father children through deception transforms intimate human relationships into mechanical processes of ethnic reproduction, denying the emotional, personal, and human dimensions of marriage and family.

The dehumanization is perhaps most evident in the treatment of Tutsi children, as by claiming that children are born Tutsi specifically to advance ethnic superiority rather than being loved members of families, Ekenge strips children of their individual humanity and reduces them to strategic assets. The characterization of *ubwenge* as something instilled even in the youngest Tutsi, as Rwandan Foreign Minister Nduhungirehe noted, places criminal targets on the backs of children. This transforms children from innocent beings deserving protection into threats requiring response, a dehumanization that has historically preceded violence against children in genocidal contexts.

The broader framing of Tutsis as a conspiracy pursuing racial dominance through deception denies them political subjectivity and moral standing. They become not fellow citizens with legitimate interests and concerns, but rather an infiltrating force whose apparent citizenship is itself a deceptive strategy. This conspiratorial framing is deeply dehumanizing because it denies the possibility of Tutsi authenticity, sincerity, or genuine belonging. Every action by Tutsis can be reinterpreted as part of the conspiracy, making them objects of suspicion rather than human beings deserving trust and community membership.

Stage Five: Organization

Organization involves state or non-state actors planning and organizing genocidal killing, often through militias to provide deniability. The Ekenge broadcast itself represents a form of organization, not of violence directly but of the ideological and social conditions that make violence possible. When coordinating a

state television appearance to promote anti-Tutsi rhetoric, state institutions organized the dissemination of genocidal ideology to mass audiences. The involvement of military leadership, state media, and presumably government approval chains demonstrate organizational capacity being deployed for hate speech promotion.

The broader context includes more direct forms of organization. State support for Wazalendo militias that target Tutsi communities represents organizational activity consistent with this stage. Integration of FDLR elements into FARDC structures⁴ brings individuals with genocidal ideology and experience into state military organizations. The pattern of impunity for anti-Tutsi violence suggests organized decisions not to investigate or prosecute such crimes. While the Ekenge broadcast itself does not constitute direct organization of violence, it occurs within an organizational ecosystem that has demonstrated capacity to mobilize violence against Tutsi populations when circumstances permit.

Stage Six: Polarization

Polarization involves driving groups apart through propaganda and violence against moderates who might bridge divides. Ekenge's broadcast directly promotes polarization by warning against intermarriage, one of the most effective mechanisms for creating cross-cutting ties that resist ethnic mobilization. Through characterizing intermarriage as infiltration requiring vigilance, Ekenge attacks the social fabric that might otherwise create solidarity across ethnic lines. This polarization makes it more difficult for Congolese of different backgrounds to maintain friendships, business relationships, and community ties that could resist ethnic manipulation.

The broadcast also polarizes by placing anyone who defends Tutsi rights or questions anti-Tutsi rhetoric in the position of being complicit with supposed infiltration strategies. This creates pressure on potential moderates to remain silent or even participate in discrimination to avoid being characterized as Tutsi sympathizers or agents. The targeting of women and intimate relationships is particularly effective at polarization as it attacks spaces where common humanity might be most apparent. If people cannot trust their spouses, neighbors, or colleagues across ethnic lines, then polarization becomes complete and mobilization becomes easier.

Stage Seven: Preparation

Preparation involves planning for genocidal killings, identifying victims, training militia, acquiring weapons, and developing kill lists. The Ekenge broadcast exhibits characteristics of ideological preparation by creating justifications and rationalizations for potential violence. So, by framing Tutsis as infiltrators pursuing demographic conquest and racial domination, the rhetoric provides both explanation for why violence might be necessary and moral license for those who might perpetrate it. The broadcast occurred on state television, giving it official imprimatur that could signal to potential perpetrators that such violence would be tolerated or even encouraged.

The M23 statement characterizing the remarks as consistent with the final stage of preparations for genocide reflects concern that ideological preparation has reached an advanced level. The parallels to the Hutu Ten Commandments⁵, followed by Hutu perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, are significant precisely because that document served preparatory functions in the lead-up to the genocide, creating ideological frameworks and justifications that were later activated when violence began. While the Ekenge broadcast does not constitute direct logistical preparation such as weapons distribution or militia training, it contributes to psychological and ideological preparation by normalizing the view that Tutsis represent an existential threat requiring response.

⁴ With some FDLR combatants having been integrated into FARDC through demobilization and reintegration programs aimed at reducing armed group activity in eastern DRC, the government has incorporated individuals with genocidal ideology and experience into state military organizations. These integration efforts, which have occurred periodically over the past two decades as part of various peace processes and stabilization initiatives, were intended to weaken armed groups by offering combatants pathways to legitimate military service. However, the presence of former FDLR members within FARDC creates direct security threats to Tutsi populations who understandably fear forces that include perpetrators or sympathizers of the genocide that targeted their community. This integration has proceeded without adequate vetting, accountability mechanisms, or reassurance to affected communities, contributing to the climate of insecurity and mistrust that undermines both civilian protection and peace process credibility.

⁵ The Hutu Ten Commandments was an inflammatory document published in a Hutu Power newspaper Kangura in 1990 in Rwanda that promoted an anti-Tutsi ideology and called for ethnic segregation and discrimination. It is considered a key piece of propaganda that incited hatred and helped lay the groundwork for the 1994 genocide against Tutsi.

Stages Not Clearly Evident in the Broadcast

Three stages of the genocide framework are not clearly evident in Ekenge's broadcast itself, though they may exist in the broader context. Stage Eight, Persecution, involves systematic violations of human rights, property seizures, and confinement to ghettos. While Congolese Tutsis face persecution in practice through displacement, violence, and discrimination, Ekenge's broadcast did not explicitly call for or announce new persecution measures. Stage Nine, Extermination, is the mass killing itself. The broadcast does not constitute extermination, though concerns exist that the rhetoric could contribute to creating conditions for such violence. Stage Ten, Denial, occurs after genocide when perpetrators deny crimes occurred. This stage is not applicable to the current situation, though the government's suspension of Ekenge while maintaining discriminatory structures could be interpreted as a form of denial that systematic problems exist.

Implications of the Ten Stages Analysis

The identification of seven stages of genocide evident in Ekenge's broadcast has profound implications for response and prevention. This is not early-stage hate speech that represents the beginning of a long process. Rather, it reflects advanced genocidal ideology being promoted through official state channels in a context where organizational capacity for violence exists and a history of ethnic mobilization provides templates for escalation. The fact that this rhetoric appeared on state television just weeks after signing peace agreements that explicitly prohibit hate speech suggests either that prevention mechanisms have failed catastrophically or that they were never genuinely implemented.

International actors with genocide prevention mandates, including the UN, African Union, and individual governments, have obligations to respond to such clear warning signals. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide requires states to take action to prevent genocide, not merely to punish it after the fact. The appearance of advanced-stage genocidal rhetoric in official state communications represents precisely the kind of early warning that prevention frameworks are designed to detect. The question is whether this warning will be heeded through concrete protective actions and accountability measures, or whether it will be minimized through diplomatic language and acceptance of cosmetic responses until warning becomes reality.

IMMEDIATE REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

Domestic Reactions Within DRC

Congolese civil society organizations responded to the broadcast with a mixture of shock, condemnation, and strategic concern. Lucha, the pro-democracy activist movement known for youth-led advocacy on governance and human rights issues, called for sanctions against Ekenge for hate speech targeting a section of Congolese citizens. However, their statement included a notable qualification, observing that such rhetoric validates claims by armed groups that Congolese Tutsis face systematic discrimination requiring protection. This framing reveals the complexity of civil society responses, which must navigate genuine concern about hate speech while recognizing that documented discrimination strengthens the political and military arguments of groups claiming to defend threatened communities. The challenge for civil society lies in condemning hate speech without appearing to minimize the legitimate security concerns of Tutsi populations who face real violence and discrimination.

Other Congolese voices expressed disbelief that such remarks could be broadcast on public television. Entrepreneur John Kanyoni took to social media to characterize the comments as unacceptable and question how state broadcasting infrastructure could be used for such purposes. The broader Congolese public response, while difficult to measure comprehensively, appeared divided between those horrified by the hate speech and those potentially receptive to anti-Tutsi messaging amid ongoing conflict. This division reflects deeper societal tensions about identity, citizenship, and blame for decades of violence in eastern regions.

The government's official response came swiftly, though critics question its substance. On December 28, one day after the broadcast, the FARDC General Staff issued a statement condemning the remarks made on RTNC by Major General Sylvain Ekenge as contrary to republican values. The statement clarified that these remarks reflect neither the position of the DRC, nor that of the President of the Republic, nor the

government. On December 29, the suspension was formally announced, with Ekenge relieved of his duties as army spokesperson. The television host, Oscar Mbal Kahij, was also suspended, reportedly for allowing the remarks to air, though this characterization ignores his active role in reinforcing the hate speech.

The state-run Agence Congolaise de Presse moved quickly to defend President Tshisekedi's record, publishing statements emphasizing that he has always fought against all forms of discrimination against the Tutsi community. These defensive communications aimed to distance the president personally from the incident and preserve his international credibility. However, the government's immediate response also included deleting the video from YouTube, a move that suggests primary concern with international perception rather than confronting the substance of what occurred. Evidently, the regime appeared more focused on managing fallout than addressing systemic issues that allowed such a broadcast.

Regional and International Responses

Rwanda's reaction was immediate and powerful with Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe characterizing the incident as evidence that the Kinshasa regime is sinking at a dizzying rate into genocidal horror. His statement drew explicit parallels to the Hutu Ten Commandments and noted that Ekenge appeared to be reading notes prepared by genocide ideologues. Nduhungirehe specifically referenced Filip Reyntjens, a Belgian academic, suggesting Ekenge's ideological framing derived from academic legitimization of ethnic categorization. The Rwandan statement emphasized that Ekenge goes so far as to claim that *ubwenge* is instilled even in the youngest Tutsi, thereby placing, as in 1994 in Rwanda, a criminal target on the backs of children.

The Rwandan government's condemnation underscores the gravity of the incident and its implications for regional stability. The statement demonstrates that despite official commitments under the Washington Accords, genocidal rhetoric continues to be broadcast on DRC state media. This creates international pressure on the DRC government to demonstrate concrete accountability beyond symbolic suspensions and raises serious questions about the regime's commitment to protecting all its citizens. Rwanda's response, given its own history with genocide, carries particular weight in highlighting the dangerous progression of hate speech when promoted through official state channels.

The M23 rebel group, operating under the Congo River Alliance political umbrella, issued its own statement describing Ekenge's comments as genocidal propaganda. Their statement characterized the remarks as part of a persistent pattern consistent with the final stage of preparations for genocide, directed against Congolese Tutsis in general and against women and children in particular. This response reflects the security concerns of Congolese Tutsi communities who view such state-sponsored hate speech as a direct threat to their safety and survival. The M23 statement positions the group as defenders of threatened communities facing systematic discrimination and violence, reinforcing their argument that armed protection remains necessary until the DRC government demonstrates a genuine commitment to protecting all Congolese citizens equally.

International reactions from Western governments were more muted but still significant. Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot stated he was extremely shocked by the broadcast, a notable intervention given Belgium's colonial history in the region and its ongoing diplomatic engagement. The United States, as the primary mediator of the Washington Accords, did not issue immediate public statements but presumably communicated concerns through diplomatic channels. The relative quiet from Washington may reflect strategic calculation about how forcefully to respond while implementation mechanisms are still being established. European Union officials and other international actors similarly avoided public condemnation while likely expressing private concern about implications for the peace process.

The UN, which maintains a peacekeeping mission in DRC and has an extensive human rights monitoring capacity, remained publicly silent on the specific incident. This silence is striking given the organization's mandate to prevent mass atrocities and its repeated warnings about the humanitarian crisis in eastern DRC. Whether reflecting diplomatic caution, bureaucratic delay, or strategic decisions about when to intervene publicly, the UN's non-response highlights limitations of international institutions in addressing early warning signals before violence escalates. The absence of a strong multilateral condemnation may have signaled to the DRC government that the incident could be managed through minimal accountability measures.

IS THE SUSPENSION SUFFICIENT?

The central question raised by the DRC government's response is whether suspending Ekenge and the television host constitutes adequate accountability for broadcasting genocidal hate speech on state television. This analysis concludes that the suspension, while symbolically significant, represents cosmetic accountability designed primarily to manage international pressure rather than address systemic issues. The evidence presented in the Ten Stages analysis makes clear that this was not mere offensive speech but rather advanced genocidal rhetoric exhibiting characteristics of the seven stages of the genocide process. Responding to such serious warning signals with administrative suspensions rather than comprehensive reforms suggests either a profound misunderstanding of the gravity of the situation or a deliberate choice to prioritize image management over genuine accountability.

The Message Has Already Been Delivered

Perhaps the most fundamental limitation of the suspension is its timing. The government acted after the hate speech had been broadcast nationwide to millions of viewers on prime-time state television. The inflammatory message characterizing Tutsi women as infiltrators and warning against intermarriage has already entered public consciousness and circulated through social networks. As strategic communication research consistently demonstrates, initial messages, particularly shocking or emotionally charged content, create lasting impressions that subsequent retractions struggle to reverse. People remember the dramatic claim more vividly than the bureaucratic correction.

The government's decision to delete the video from YouTube further confirms this dynamic. By removing evidence while issuing condemnations, the regime revealed its primary concern was international perception rather than domestic impact. The deletion prevents further sharing of the video internationally, where it might damage DRC's reputation, but does little to address the fact that domestic audiences who watched live or heard about the broadcast secondhand have already absorbed the core messages. Those messages will likely be reinforced through informal networks and may further shape attitudes toward Tutsi neighbors, colleagues, and community members in ways that increase vulnerability to violence.

This pattern of message delivery followed by damage control achieves certain strategic objectives even if unintended. The anti-Tutsi narrative has been amplified through state channels, potentially mobilizing nationalist sentiment and reinforcing existing prejudices. The regime can then claim to reject such positions through suspensions and statements, satisfying international partners while the substantive message continues to circulate domestically. Critics argue this represents a deliberate strategy rather than institutional failure, a calculated deployment of hate speech with plausible deniability built in through swift but superficial accountability measures.

Structural Discrimination Remains Unaddressed

The suspension focuses exclusively on individuals while leaving intact institutional structures that enable anti-Tutsi discrimination. Multiple analysts and civil society organizations argue that such discrimination is not aberrational but systematically embedded in Congolese state institutions under Tshisekedi's government. If accurate, removing one spokesperson while maintaining underlying practices accomplishes little beyond creating the appearance of accountability. The question becomes whether Ekenge's real fault was saying such things or saying them openly in a way that betrayed the confidential nature of policies meant to be applied quietly.

Evidence of structural discrimination extends well beyond this single broadcast. Congolese Tutsis continue to face systematic labeling as foreigners or Rwandan agents, a characterization that legitimizes violence, theft, and expulsion. Wazalendo militias have received various forms of state support, including arms, logistics, and political legitimization, even as these groups specifically target Tutsi communities. The integration of FDLR elements into FARDC structures places genocide perpetrators and ideologues within state security forces, creating direct threats to the populations they previously victimized. Land expropriations force Tutsi families from properties their ancestors cultivated for generations, with state authorities often facilitating or tolerating such displacement.

Propaganda characterizing Tutsis as existential threats has been amplified not just through military spokespersons but through political figures, media outlets, and civil society organizations that receive state patronage or legitimization. Some individuals known for promoting anti-Tutsi narratives have been received at the Presidential Palace, sending signals about what discourse is acceptable despite official condemnations. This creates a permissive environment in which hate speech flourishes because perpetrators understand that consequences are minimal and political benefits may be substantial. Suspending Ekenge while maintaining this broader ecosystem does nothing to address the structural problem.

The government's failure to announce investigations into how the broadcast was approved, scheduled, and facilitated further indicates an unwillingness to examine systemic issues. A genuine accountability process would trace decision chains to understand who authorized Ekenge's appearance, whether his remarks were reviewed in advance, why the television host reinforced rather than challenged the hate speech, and what institutional failures allowed this to occur. The absence of such an investigation suggests the suspension aims to sacrifice two individuals while protecting broader structures and avoiding uncomfortable revelations about policy coordination.

Patterns of Impunity for Anti-Tutsi Violence

The Ekenge incident occurs within a broader pattern of impunity for anti-Tutsi violence and discrimination. Attacks on Tutsi communities rarely result in the prosecution of perpetrators, investigations are routinely stalled or abandoned, and victims struggle to access justice or reparations. This impunity extends from street-level violence through militia operations to high-level political rhetoric. When consequences do occur, they tend to be symbolic gestures like suspensions rather than prosecutions, trials, and meaningful sanctions.

The pattern is visible in how Wazalendo militias operate with apparent state support despite targeting civilians based on ethnicity. These groups have been implicated in massacres, sexual violence, forced displacement, and destruction of property, yet militia leaders often maintain political connections and face few consequences. Some have been integrated into security structures or given political positions, reinforcing perceptions that anti-Tutsi violence carries benefits rather than costs. When international pressure demands responses, individuals may be temporarily sidelined, but underlying relationships and support networks remain intact.

This impunity creates conditions for escalation. When hate speech on state television is met with only administrative suspension, without prosecution, media monitoring, or systematic reform, it signals that such actions are not serious violations but merely manageable public relations problems. When political and military figures understand they can engage in discriminatory rhetoric or violence without facing genuine accountability, incentives favor continuation and potential escalation. The international community's acceptance of symbolic gestures reinforces these dynamics by allowing governments to claim responsiveness while maintaining substantive policies unchanged.

Undermining Peace Agreement Obligations

The Ekenge incident directly violates explicit provisions of the peace agreements that the DRC government signed just weeks earlier. The Concept of Operations developed under the Luanda Process requires an end to hate speech and verbal attacks explicitly. The broader Washington Accords commit parties to protecting all citizens without distinction and promoting full respect for human rights. Broadcasting genocidal rhetoric on state television through the army's official spokesperson represents perhaps the most flagrant possible violation of these commitments, occurring during the crucial early implementation phase when the government was supposed to be demonstrating good faith.

This raises fundamental questions about the government's capacity or willingness to implement agreement provisions. If the DRC cannot control its own army spokesperson from delivering prepared hate speech on state television, how can it be expected to execute the complex, coordinated actions required for peace implementation? These include establishing joint security mechanisms with Rwanda, conducting operations against the FDLR, facilitating the return of refugees, protecting displaced populations, and implementing economic cooperation frameworks. All of these require institutional capacity, coordination across government agencies, and sustained political will. The failure to prevent or quickly sanction the broadcast suggests either profound dysfunction or deliberate policy contradiction.

The incident also undermines trust between parties, which is essential for joint mechanism functionality. Rwanda now possesses powerful evidence supporting its narrative about systematic anti-Tutsi discrimination in DRC, evidence that will shape its approach to implementation and potentially justify non-compliance with withdrawal commitments. Other parties to various peace processes, including M23 in the Doha framework, can point to the incident as validation of their security concerns and justification for maintaining military capacity. The United States and other mediators face questions about whether economic incentives can overcome deep-seated ethnic tensions when governments actively promote hate speech through official channels.

Creating Tangible Risks for Civilians

Beyond political and diplomatic implications, the broadcast creates immediate protection risks for Tutsi civilians in DRC. Genocide scholarship consistently demonstrates that state-sponsored hate speech targeting specific groups increases vulnerability to violence by dehumanizing victims, legitimizing discrimination, and creating permissive environments for perpetrators. When such messages come from military officials on state television, they carry particular authority and may be interpreted as implicit permission or even encouragement for violence against targeted populations.

The specific content of Ekenge's remarks, warning against intermarriage and characterizing Tutsi women as infiltrators, has historical precedent in pre-genocide environments. Similar rhetoric in Rwanda helped create conditions for mass mobilization against the Tutsi population by framing even the most intimate family relationships as threats requiring response. Civilians who heard these broadcasts may internalize suspicion toward Tutsi neighbors, avoid business or social relationships with Tutsi colleagues, or, in extreme cases, view violence as legitimate self-defense against supposed infiltration. Each of these responses increases the isolation and vulnerability of Tutsi communities.

The analysis through the Ten Stages of Genocide framework makes clear that this is not early-stage rhetoric that might be addressed through education and dialogue. Rather, it represents advanced genocidal ideology exhibiting seven of ten stages, indicating that conditions for mass violence may be approaching if not already present. The M23 statement characterizing the remarks as consistent with final stage preparations for genocide, while serving strategic objectives, also reflects genuine concerns based on historical pattern recognition. International actors with genocide prevention mandates have obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to take seriously such warning signals. The fact that the broadcast occurred suggests existing prevention mechanisms failed, while the suspension-only response suggests those mechanisms remain inadequate to the threat environment.

CONCLUSION

The broadcast of genocidal hate speech by Ekenge on state television represents far more than an isolated incident of individual misconduct. Analysis through the Ten Stages of Genocide framework reveals that his rhetoric exhibits characteristics of at least seven stages, including classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, and preparation. This indicates an advanced level of genocidal ideology being promoted through official state channels in a context where organizational capacity for violence exists, and a history of ethnic mobilization provides templates for escalation. The incident exposes fundamental challenges to implementing the Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity, reveals deep structural discrimination within DRC state institutions, and provides stark early warning signals of potential mass atrocity crimes.

The government's response through suspension of individuals without addressing systemic issues suggests either profound institutional weakness or deliberate maintenance of discriminatory policies masked by diplomatic commitments. The fact that this occurred just three weeks after the December signing ceremony of the Washington Accords, during the crucial early implementation phase when parties were expected to build trust through concrete actions, makes the violation particularly damaging. Rather than demonstrating commitment to peace agreement provisions prohibiting hate speech and protecting all citizens, the incident revealed that such commitments may be rhetorical rather than operational.

The parallels to pre-genocide rhetoric in Rwanda cannot be dismissed as rhetorical exaggeration. Ekenge's targeting of Tutsi women as infiltrators, deployment of colonial racial theories, and characterization of intermarriage as a strategic threat directly mirror the Hutu Ten Commandments that helped create conditions for the 1994 genocide. The delivery through state television by a senior military official reading prepared notes, with active reinforcement by the television host, indicates this was not spontaneous but rather represented the deployment of proven genocidal propaganda strategies. The identification of seven stages of genocide in this single broadcast should alarm all actors with genocide prevention mandates and trigger immediate protective measures beyond symbolic accountability. For the Washington Accords to have any realistic chance of success, responses must move beyond cosmetic accountability to address systemic discrimination. The DRC government must demonstrate genuine reforms in military structures, media regulation, civilian protection, and responsibility for violence. International mediators must use economic leverage to demand concrete progress rather than accepting symbolic gestures. Rwanda must engage in good faith with implementation while avoiding instrumentalization of legitimate concerns for strategic purposes. Civil society must continue documentation, advocacy, and community-level protection work that provides both immediate security and long-term resilience against hate speech.

The pattern of peace agreements signed abroad while fighting rages on the ground has repeated too many times in the DRC-Rwanda conflict. The Ekenge incident threatens to place the Washington Accords in the same category as failed agreements unless responses acknowledge the depth of the challenges and adapt their approaches accordingly. When genocidal rhetoric exhibiting seven of ten stages appears on state television weeks after signing agreements prohibiting such speech, this cannot be treated as a minor implementation hiccup. It represents either catastrophic institutional failure or deliberate policy contradiction, both of which fundamentally undermine peace prospects.

The international community faces a critical choice between taking early warning signals seriously and prioritizing the diplomatic process over protection concerns. The Ekenge broadcast provides clear evidence that advanced genocidal rhetoric is being normalized through state institutions. The Ten Stages analysis demonstrates this is not early-stage hate speech but rather ideology exhibiting multiple characteristics of late-stage genocidal processes. The question is whether mediators will demand genuine accountability and systemic reform now, or whether economic and political considerations will lead to accepting cosmetic gestures while ethnic hatred continues to be promoted at the highest levels of the Congolese state.

For organizations working on genocide prevention and peacebuilding in the Great Lakes Region, the incident underscores the ongoing relevance and urgency of their missions. The fact that such rhetoric can be broadcast on state television in 2025, more than 30s after the Rwanda genocide and with extensive international presence and peacebuilding efforts, demonstrates that prevention work remains far from complete. The Ten Stages framework provides systematic analytical tools for recognizing escalation risks, but those tools are only useful if actors with the capacity to intervene take findings seriously and act accordingly.

The Ekenge incident will be remembered either as an early warning signal that the international community heeded, prompting genuine reforms that protected populations and salvaged the peace process, or as another ignored warning that preceded escalating violence. Which outcome prevails depends on choices made now by governments, mediators, and civil society actors. The evidence is clear, the analytical frameworks are established, the risks are documented, and the obligations exist under international law and regional frameworks. What remains to be seen is whether political will exists to act on that evidence, address those risks, and fulfill those obligations before warning signals become tragic realities. The answer to that question will determine not only the fate of the Washington Accords but potentially the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians in one of the world's most protracted humanitarian crises.

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Note on Sources

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