

For immediate release

Survivors' concerns over imminent closure of gacaca courts need to be addressed

Kigali, 15 June 2012 – Many survivors in Rwanda fear that with the official closure of the gacaca courts on Monday, 18 June 2012, their right to reparation will be ignored forever, according to human rights organisations SURF and REDRESS.

It is still unclear what impact the closure will have on survivors' right to reparation. It is also unclear how thousands of compensation and/or restitution awards, that were granted by gacaca courts and that have not yet been enforced, will now be handled.

Research and interviews with genocide survivors conducted by SURF and REDRESS over the last five years indicate that many survivors feel that justice has not been served, as the process has not included adequate reparation.

The failure to enforce reparation orders has had a significant adverse impact upon survivors' lives and their perceptions of justice, according to both organisations.

SURF and REDRESS call for the establishment of a Task Force on Reparations to further consider how to address the gaps with reparation, now that gacaca courts are closing.

Juergen Schurr, REDRESS' Legal Advisor, said: *"As the Rwandan Government celebrates the achievements of gacaca over the past 10 years, it is now important to also address its shortcomings, including the lack of compensation for moral and bodily damage for survivors of the genocide."*

Albert Gasake, SURF's Legal Advocacy Project Coordinator, said: *"While it is impossible to fully compensate for crimes such as genocide, awarding reparation payments can help to restore the dignity of survivors by acknowledging the suffering that they have been subjected to."*

A Task Force on Reparations could address issues such as identifying the number of compensation and restitution awards that have yet to be implemented. If established, it could consult closely with survivors and survivor organisations in Rwanda to identify their needs and determine adequate measures of reparation. It could also take into account experiences of reparation programmes in other countries, such as South Africa, Morocco and Sierra Leone.

Research published this month by Legal Aid Forum (Rwanda) based on interviews with over 2,700 claimants in Rwanda shows that gacaca court judgments are the "hardest to enforce", with 92% of all genocide-related judgements yet to be enforced.

There are several reasons for the failure to enforce compensation awards, but the inability or unwillingness of indigent perpetrators to pay the awards is one main cause. The organisations' research also indicates that in many cases, perpetrators bribed those in charge of the execution of judgements to avoid payment.

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About SURF: Survivors Fund (SURF) is the principal international organisation representing and supporting survivors of the genocide. Since 1997 it has delivered support for survivors including housing and healthcare, education and employment, and is not focusing on restorative justice. More information: www.survivors-fund.org.uk

About REDRESS: REDRESS is a human rights organisation that helps torture survivors obtain justice and reparation. REDRESS works with survivors to help restore their dignity and to make torturers accountable, and since 2010 has been working with SURF on this work in Rwanda. More information on www.redress.org