

FROM: Austin Bar Association

SUBJECT: An Invitation to Visit Rwanda in September

As a member of the Austin Bar Association, I would like to extend to you this personal invitation as a benefit that will enhance both your personal and professional knowledge. I invite you to join People to People in an amazing opportunity to learn firsthand from the remarkable people of **Rwanda** the incredible stories they have to tell.

As a People to People Citizen Ambassador, you will have a unique opportunity to discover first hand what has been largely overlooked by the world press. Almost 13 years ago, one of the worst genocides in history took place in Rwanda. Over a million people were killed in less than 100 days. The story has been the subject of countless movies and documentaries, but the most remarkable story of all is how this small African nation has managed to reconcile. Look around Rwanda today, and you see smiles, not tears. How can that be, in a country with over a million orphans—the highest number in the world?

After the 1994 war Rwandese were forced to confront the social issues that had caused the genocide. The legal system was overwhelmed with more than nearly 200,000 perpetrators of genocide who were awaiting trial. Estimates were that the trials would take over 400 years to conduct through regular legal channels. The country needed a system to speed the trials and at the same time to satisfy the victims' need for justice. The unique solution was to reintroduce a system called Gacaca (lawn trial). The goal of the delegation is not only to understand the system of Gacaca, but also to witness the remarkable story of reconciliation between the various ethnic groups of Rwanda. Additionally, you will learn about the process of defining a new constitution and hear about the strategy to ensure that the legal system supports Rwanda's strategy to become the "Switzerland of Africa" and an investor safe haven.

We have planned for your delegation to meet with the Minister of Justice, Tharcisse Karugarama, who will explain Rwanda's unique blend of traditional approaches and western law known as Gacaca. There are also meetings planned with Fatuma Ntangiza, Executive Secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. She will explain what is being done to reconcile a nation divided by the genocide of 1994.

As part of your People to People experience, you will also learn first hand from remarkable people with incredible stories to tell.

- Rafiki, an attorney from Rwanda, gave up his practice to create a safe haven for the street boys of Kigali
- Freddie, the sole survivor of his family, managed to escape detection for 100 days during the events of 1994
- Arlene decided, at the age of 73, to give up her "quietly retired" life in Ohio and move to Rwanda to start the Urukundo Home for Children
- Safari, a young lawyer, joined Haguruka (a local NGO) to provide legal advice to the country's poorest women
- Jean, the coordinator of the Dancing Pots Pottery Project, is fighting for the rights of the marginalized Batwa people

Today, Rwanda is a proud and peaceful country focused on their future – a focus known as “Vision 2020”. The major aspiration of their vision is to transform Rwanda from a subsistence economy to a middle income country with interventions in education, health care, agriculture and business. We want you to be a part of this vision. In Rwanda, you can make a difference in the lives of citizens.

Program highlights include visits to:

- Aegis Trust’s Genocide Memorial in Kigali, including a talk by an expert on the unification and reconciliation process
- Rwanda’s Millennium Village and firsthand perspectives on Jeffrey Sachs’ poverty intervention principles
- National Service of Gacaca Jurisdictions - while the Gacaca trials are almost at an end, this organization still has much work to do with the transfer of Arusha prisoners
- National Human Rights Commission - Rwanda is frequently criticized abroad for its record of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and political freedom; you will explore these issues and decide for yourself if the government’s tough stand is justified
- Orphanages and street children projects
- A craft-making cooperative where widows of genocide and wives of the perpetrators of genocide weave baskets of peace

In addition to rebuilding its society, Rwanda has focused on conservation of its natural resources, including the rare Mountain Gorillas made famous by Dian Fossey and the film “Gorillas in the Mist.” The “people of the forest,” under 24-hour protection, are once again increasing in population. There will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for delegates to visit the gorillas in their volcanic kingdom. You will find more details on the extension [here](#) *{link to extension itinerary}* and since permits are limited be sure to sign up for the extension as soon as possible.

This delegation departs New York on September 18 and returns September 28, 2008, and will visit Kigali and the outlying areas. The estimated program tuition is \$5,995 USD and includes roundtrip airfare from the departure city, group transportation, meetings and cultural activities, accommodations, most meals, and essentially all other costs associated with participation.

This program is limited to 24 participants. Registrations will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. [Visit our website](#) *{link to citizenambassadors.org}* for more information and to apply for the delegation.

Here is what some of our past delegates to Rwanda have to say, in their own words:

“I expected to find a country overshadowed by a dark emotional cloud. Instead, I found a people focused on the future – with a positive, bright spirit and energies vigorously applied to change, to building and growing into more than they’ve been.”

-- Dr. Constance Haan, Citizen Ambassador Programs Delegate
MIU to Rwanda, September 2007

“I never would have had such a life changing and eye opening experience without my travel to Rwanda through People to People...it was much more than a tour or even a cultural exchange; it was a profound change in personal perspective and for that I am very grateful.”

"In one week we managed to meet more inspirational people, visit more NGOs and nonprofit groups, and see more sights than I ever would have been able to do in a month on my own. Without participating in the People to People delegation, I would not have been able to appreciate the many ways in which the country and its people are progressing, nor would I have understood the depth of this progress and how far reaching it is."

-- Angela Cerkevich, Citizen Ambassador Programs Delegate
MIU to Rwanda, September 2007

If you have any questions, please contact Debbie Long, Program Specialist for People to People Citizen Ambassador Programs, at 877.787.2000, extension 7012, or 00.1.509.568.7012. Her email address is debbie.long@ptpprograms.org, and the fax number is 877.676.5844 or 00.1.509.568.7130.

We hope that you will join us for this once in a lifetime opportunity to learn first hand about Rwanda's incredible story, the people who survived, and the justice system that is shaping a new country. We're looking forward to seeing you in Rwanda!

Sincerely,

Richard Pena
Past President, Travis County Bar Association
Past President, Texas Bar Association
Board of Governors, American Bar Association