

# 17<sup>th</sup> COMMEMORATION OF THE GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI

*‘Upholding the Truth; Preserving our Dignity’*

**Ambassador’s Speech**

**The Hague, 07 April 2011**

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Excellencies, Honourable Government Officials, Faculty, Students, Fellow Compatriots, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Greetings!

First, I would like to thank you for joining us during this somber moment of reflection as we commemorate the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, in which over one million men, women and children were murdered in one hundred days. This year’s theme for the 17<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi is: *“Upholding the Truth; Preserving our Dignity”*.

As we remember, honour our people and bow in prayer for them – as we remember the pain, the grief, and senseless brutality they endured, with the same stoic spirit, we stand strong and confidently declare that this will never happen again. We resolve to transform our grief into strength and renewed determination to build a better future that Rwanda deserves. A future that is fast becoming a reality, a country in which all Rwandans live side by side in dignity and mutual respect.

We live in perilous times, great tragedies are occurring ever so frequently, heart rending scenes of earthquakes in Turkey and Chile not too long ago, and more recently and dramatically in Haiti and Australia,

unbelievable scenes of the destructive tsunami in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and more recently in Japan, ferocious floods and landslides in China and Pakistan. All great natural tragedies that mesmerised us, leaving us gasping in disbelief at what Mother Nature was unleashing on our planet. The world cried with Chileans, Haitians, Indonesians, Sri Lankans, Australians, Japanese, Chinese, Pakistanis. The world was moved as humankind at its altruist best was brought to bear and efforts marshalled to respond not only in expression of sympathy, but in swift action to assist. Please join me to commit to memory all those who lost their lives in these tragedies, families that lost loved ones; and others that continue to suffer the aftermath today.

Let's also remember our brothers and sisters across Africa, who continue to suffer due to wars and political turmoil; in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Cote d' Ivoire, Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Let's not forget our brothers and sisters in Iraq, Afghanistan, and those who are presently faced with precarious political uncertainty in the Middle East.

We continue to be horrified, outraged by the incredible brutality and unbelievable suffering inflicted upon man by fellow human beings, the only species known to wilfully inflict harm to its own kind. We are led to wonder why indeed human civilization seems to have eluded the human soul and mind.

Just as it is our moral responsibility to empathize with, and assist, victims of natural disasters; so it should be too, in equal measure, our moral responsibility as human beings, to protect and uphold human dignity, to avert atrocities from happening anywhere in the world, and if they do happen, to forcefully condemn them and actively intervene to stop the atrocity, as the entire humanity is diminished whenever even one single human being anywhere in the world suffers, or life is senselessly lost.

The Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda was only possible because of a calculated and sinister plot by the former Rwandan government, using all instruments of the government, including mass media, and co-opted the population to exterminate and expunge from Rwanda the entire Tutsi population. This was carried out under the gaze of international media, and in spite of a presence of a peacekeeping operation which had the means, but lacked the will, to stop it. Indeed the glaring inaction of the international community is well documented and so is the concerted effort by the UN Security Council, at the height of the Genocide, to dither and obfuscate, determined not to use the word Genocide, in order not to be bound by the 1948 Genocide Convention. The United Nations bears double responsibility, not only for its negligence through vacillation and inaction, but for giving the Rwandan people false hope that the presence of its peacekeeping force would provide security.

Today, 17 years later, there are people (indeed many of them Rwandan), groups, organizations, and countries, who, riddled with guilt of complicity, participation, or inaction during the Genocide, in an attempt to cleanse themselves of this guilt, deny that the Genocide ever occurred, audaciously suggest notions of double genocide, and some among them even advocate its very exterminationist ideology and still believe that as long as there is still a Tutsi alive, the work is not done.

In order to draw lessons from the Genocide it is crucial to understand how and why it happened, not only learn to spot the signs and symptoms, but to also muster the requisite political will to act to prevent it in the future. As Rwandans, we continue to remember the Genocide against the Tutsi, because we don't want it to happen again, because we would never want the horror that befell us to be visited upon another country.

As philosopher Edmund Burke so aptly put it; *“All that is necessary for the forces of evil to triumph in the world, is for enough good men to do nothing.”* In 1994, many a good man did nothing, many a good organization did nothing, many a good country stood by. Burke also

famously stated that; *“Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it.”*

In Rwanda, we remember the Genocide against the Tutsi, not because we are masochists. For those who were so profoundly touched by the Genocide, remembering is paramount, forgetting unthinkable. By forgetting, we risk giving an avenue and space for a repeat. You are all aware of the *Remember Me* project this week, undertaken by the Holocaust Memorial in Washington DC, well over 60 years after the Holocaust! For Rwanda, memories are still fresh, the earth on the graves is still fresh, the reminders are too many, the generation that suffered the Genocide is still alive, and so is the one that perpetrated it.

But while Rwanda is determined not to forget the horror of the Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda has refused to be shackled to, and hamstrung by this dark chapter in our history. In grief we must find strength and resolve to move forward in dignity and shed the legacy of Genocide, renew ourselves and be characterized by more positive attributes.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

While we are here to commemorate the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda; today, please allow me to also share with you the great strides that Rwanda has made to lift itself from the abyss: from a broken infrastructure, shattered education and healthcare systems as most teachers and healthcare workers were either dead or had fled the country. A country without electricity or sanitation, no electricians or sanitation workers, no national archives and an empty treasury. Everything movable had been practically taken. The Genocide perpetrators thoroughly looted the country, stock, crate and barrel and established themselves across the border in neighbouring countries. The Rwanda that the current government inherited, Ladies and Gentlemen, was a country littered with dead bodies, *more than a million of them (those are the counted ones, some were swept away by the rivers or*

*sank to the bottom of lakes, some mass graves are yet to be found*), Rwanda was a country of orphans, widows, maimed, sick, wounded, and the traumatized; a country so collapsed that it was written off by many analysts, as it bore the hallmarks of a failed state. A country that has had to pull itself from its own bootstraps with practically no boots to talk about.

Rwanda has dramatically transformed itself from a country, not on the brink, but indeed in the very chasm of failed states 17 years ago, into a model country that enjoys respect among the community of nations, in the region, on the continent and the world at large. Rwanda has made tremendous progress in the last 17 years and all Rwandans today, have a renewed sense of pride and dignity in being Rwandan, and renewed hope for continued peace and prosperity. Rwanda has admirably mended and reconciled the frayed social fabric of its communities through a home grown process of reconciliation that has become the model for other countries in the region emerging from conflict. Rwanda has created a secure environment and distinguished itself as the most secure country in the region. From a story of despair, to one of hope; from a country tittering on the brink to a haven of stability, meaningfully contributing to peace in the region and beyond.

The current Rwandan government stopped the Genocide and ended a culture of impunity, reinstated an old justice and dispute resolution mechanism and restored other traditional systems, most of which have become best practices that are being emulated by other countries. (*Imihigo*, Performance Contracts, a mechanism of accountability for leaders - shared with Liberia, *Gacaca* justice and reconciliation mechanism -shared with Sudan and Sierra Leone; corporate governance and anti-corruption drive -shared with Uganda; constitution drafting - shared with Kenya decentralization -shared with Malawi; Rwanda's gender mainstreaming and ICT infrastructure –shared with Namibia, and many other examples that we are proud of and willing to share.

Rwanda's economy continues to grow steadily. In the last three years, Rwanda's GDP has been growing at an average rate of 7% annually, down from double digits in 2008 due to the Financial Crisis. Double digit growth rates are an unknown phenomenon in our part of the world and in developed countries. What this means, is that Rwanda is well on its way to forward to self-sufficiency. Rwanda is one of the few developing countries on track to meet (and exceed) the MDGs. Rwanda has eradicated malaria and achieved universal healthcare for all Rwandans, a feat not too small even for developed countries (you will all be aware of acrimonious debates in the US over healthcare, particularly the sticky issue of universal healthcare). Infant and maternal mortality rates have dramatically dropped. Life expectancy has shot up. Annual per capita income figures have quadrupled since 2000, so have the number of households with electricity. Rwanda has attained full food security and is producing excess for the market. The infrastructure has improved significantly with paved roads across the country. The number of Rwandans with access to clean water has risen from 41% in 2003 to 80% today. Rwanda has attracted world-wide acclaim and attention for having the highest percentage of women lawmakers in the Lower Chamber of the Parliament, which figure currently stands at an impressive 56.5%.

The number of domestic and foreign investors also continues to rise, providing jobs, contributing more revenue and building the nation in the process. Rwanda was cited *Top Reformer* by the World Bank in its Doing Business Report in 2009. With a vibrant and virgin economy, Rwanda has been cited the best investment destination. Rwanda has adopted strategies to protect the environment, natural resources, tourist attraction and national heritage sites, which have led to an ever growing number of tourists visiting Rwanda every year. Last year alone, we received 666,000 tourists, that contributed US \$200 million to the economy.

There are now more schools for Rwandan children at every stage of their education, all with better materials, books and equipment. Rwanda is one of the pilot countries of the OLPC, and has procured and

distributed so far 110,000 laptops to elementary school children through this program. This is a fundamental step toward building the requisite infrastructure for a knowledge-based economy. Rwanda is positioning itself to be the ICT hub for the region and has just completed laying a fibre optic network across the country with fallow capacity and redundancies to provide soft services for the entire region.

All these and more positive developments I cannot enumerate here, are owed to good governance and sound policies that have taken root in Rwanda, a country that is now characterised by rule of law, accountability, the respect of human rights, good fiscal policies, sound education and healthcare systems, and responsible social and environmental policies. Rwanda is engendering a culture of accountability and transparency and has adopted, and vigorously enforced, a policy of zero tolerance on corruption, and many other good practices that are becoming the norm. Indeed, in its 2010, Transparency International hailed Rwanda for its efforts in fighting corruption and after a lengthy analysis, reported in July last year that Rwanda had negligible corruption.

Above all, ladies and gentlemen, Rwanda is committed to holistically rebuilding the shattered lives of its citizens, finding lasting solutions for survivors, and establishing harmonious coexistence among its people. The reconstruction of Rwanda and the level of development achieved so far, have been possible because Rwanda has a clear vision, an unwavering commitment to implement it, and understands the absolute necessity for all its citizens to work together as one people.

Ladies and Gentlemen, all these are some of the domestic achievements, and I would be remiss not to recognize the significant role played by our friends and partners, particularly the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in its enduring support to Rwanda through this whole process.

Assuming our responsibility as global citizens and in the spirit of ensuring that Genocide never occurs again anywhere else in the world, Rwanda participates actively in peace support operations worldwide as a United Nations troop- and police-contributing country. We currently

have more than 3200 soldiers and over 255 police officers in Sudan (North/South Sudan and Darfur), and more than 374 Police officers serving in different UN missions in: Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad and Haiti. Last year, Rwanda deployed a 92-strong Formed Police Unit exclusively comprised of women to Darfur to conduct training in Gender Based Violence and Child Protection. Rwanda continues to take its domestic, regional and international responsibilities very seriously.

Without any pretence at mastery of the Holy Book, and respectful of all other faiths, please permit me to quote to you a poignant scripture from the New Testament. **Mathew 5:14-16**

*“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven”.*

Ladies and Gentlemen, Rwanda has become a country characterised by good governance, whose light and truth cannot be hidden under a bushel, and whose dignity it shall continue to uphold.

Fellow compatriots, as this year's theme states, let's uphold the truth and preserve our dignity. As we march forward in dignity, we are determined not let our success story today be stolen by the ghosts of yesteryear.

I thank you heartily for your attention.