



ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME

Kwibuka 27

Kigali, 7 April 2021

What Jean-Damascène Bizimana has just told us, those are facts. Facts of our history, facts about what happened, and the responsibilities thereof. For those deniers, if they have no shame, why should I have fear?

Today, as every year, we gather together to remember the Genocide against the Tutsi. I thank you all for taking part in this ceremony.

This may be the 27th time we have marked commemoration, but the occasion is never ordinary. There are always reminders of what is at stake. New mass graves are regularly discovered. Many perpetrators still roam free.

But we cannot allow the weight of our history to crush us.

This is also the second Kwibuka during the Covid-19 pandemic. The physical distance only adds to the emotional burden on survivors, whose quiet strength has nourished our nation's revival. We thank you and we honour the sacrifices you have made for the sake of a better future for us all.



We also credit Rwanda's rebirth to the fact that the larger part of Rwandans wanted to build a better nation and overcome the manipulations by the bad leaders of the past. Given the chance to live better and see things differently, our people seized it. This is an indispensable part of our strength.

As a result, even in the midst of constant pressures and distractions, Rwanda today is unquestionably more united and forward-looking than ever before. And here, I am speaking particularly about the youth, who are the vast majority of our country's people.

That is why all efforts to divide and divert us have failed, and will continue to fail.

Kwibuka challenges us to reflect on the context of the present moment, as well as the cumulative history that has led us here.

Rwanda may not yet be wealthy or fully healthy, and we have vulnerabilities and limitations, like any country. But we also know how to deal with our problems. Rwandans are resilient, and we are full of purpose and hope.

The immensity of what has been achieved is almost miraculous. The results are attested to by Rwandans, and indeed indisputable.

First, there are the tangible signs, things that we can see and feel.

New buildings and roads. Better hospitals and health centres. Water and electricity services, where they never existed before.



Visitors flocking to see Rwanda's unique wildlife and enjoy our hospitality.

But the intangible transformations which have taken place in the hearts and minds of our people are even more important. They allow progress to be sustained from generation to generation.

Our unity and nationhood, which continues to grow. The trust we have in each other as a people, and in our leaders and institutions. Positive mindsets of creativity, accountability, and self-reliance. The satisfaction of seeing Rwanda's story serve as an uplifting symbol of renewal, even hopefully beyond our borders. And the collective self-assurance that comes from the spirit of *agaciro*, which inspires everything we do.

The Rwandans of today have gained a lot, which means we have something precious to defend. This requires constant vigilance, along with a commitment to introspection and honesty.

Decades, even centuries of progress, can be wiped away in the blink of an eye. We have seen examples in different societies around the world, no matter how advanced.

I know for certain that Rwandans will always be ready to protect what we have built, without hesitation or apology.

Like every country, Rwanda has the right to use all legitimate and lawful means to counter attacks on our people — no question about it — and on the principles of our Constitution.



Whenever possible, we bring those who threaten our country's peace and security to justice. The rule of law is not up for debate. In fact, there are several trials underway in our courts, involving various violent armed groups.

Among those who are undergoing trial, there are those who have been living outside, protected, one way or the other. And it is all connected with the story of denial, distortion, and publication of all kinds of things.

It's interesting to find that when these trials are ongoing, for some — especially those who were hosting these people — the issue is not what they did which they are being tried for, the issue is how they got here. Fine. If they got here the wrong way, we can talk about that. There is no problem.

But shouldn't we concentrate also on what is more important, which is why they are being tried in the courts of law? It's not too complicated to understand that. You can figure out for yourselves why it happens that way. Maybe we will get to understand more as we go on.

Rwandans believe that our country cannot afford to allow such dangerous games against our people to be played on our territory, ever again. When the line into violence is crossed, there is also a remedy for that.



Most of these actors sought international relevance by killing innocent people and threatening our economy. Unfortunately, this strategy of attention-seeking has sometimes worked for them.

You know, some of these people are out there in places where they have a lot of lessons for us, as to what is democracy, freedom, all kinds of political and civil rights. At the same time, they embrace these people, protect them, defend them, speak for them. Because, they are saying, these are people who want to civilise Rwanda and bring it closer to that level, where we are not.

Now, many times — and I am trying to get to the bottom of this question — I ask, why is this? Maybe we will come to it later, but I just want to tell you a few things.

There are a couple of cases where we told their hosts that they are actually criminals. They have killed, they have stolen, they have raped, they have done all kinds of things. And we have the capacity to try them. But they say no, these are critics of the leaders of Rwanda. These are people fighting for freedom, for rights of all kinds.

Now, what is interesting again, is that it doesn't take very long before they actually realise what we were talking about, because a couple of them are now serving sentences in those countries. They are in prison for actually having done some of the things we told these people these criminals have been known for.



And, in the court, these people — it's really very interesting — when they are being tried out there in Europe, America, different places, even with evidence that these people have either raped or stolen money in those countries, they still stay no, it is actually President Kagame who is sending his agents, they are the ones.

But how I can I send somebody to give instructions to rape and you rape? How can I send somebody to tell you to steal and you steal? So if there are cases you need to sort out with Rwandan leaders, that's okay, but you first answer for those acts. And we go back to our friends and say: But we told you. Still they will not believe us, even when they have seen it.

You heard the other day when the person was brought here, and the question is how he got here, not how he was leading a group that was killing people in Rwanda. You saw how others from those countries testified in the court and confirmed what they were being accused of, and planning it outside, where they lived. Recently one or two people living outside said that what was said in court is true. They are actually doing these things they are accused of, but here we are protected. Nothing is going to happen to us, and you are not going to be able to bring us there, as you have brought others.

So you can see how disturbing this is. But yes, we fully understand the world we live in.

Disgraced former officials, motivated by petty resentments, have spent years cultivating influential foreign gatekeepers with a flimsy campaign of lies.



My friends, you can tell any lie about me; you are free to do so. You can pile up tons of lies; it won't change me, absolutely not. It won't change this country to be what you want it to be. It doesn't matter how many lies. That I can promise you.

When the storytellers happen to have been born in the right kind of place, out there, their impartiality and integrity is simply taken for granted. Just by where they are born. Whatever they say against you is supposed to be taken for granted. It has nothing to do with the facts. It only has to do with where this person was born. These are the places most of these problems come from.

Falsehoods become facts, and victims become villains. Acts of terrorism are portrayed as principled expressions of opposition and dissent, while Rwanda's response is singled out for criticism.

Let me tell you this: We will be happy to be criticised for doing what we have to do, and believe that we have to do, against these acts against us.

Are these really the people who represent the universal values we all claim to espouse? It is outright wrong. It's wrong. It can't be otherwise. We are left wondering how many bodies there have to be before we are seen as having the right to take appropriate action.

Do you remember the famous interview in the old days, in 1994, where people had problems naming what was happening at that time? Some people were struggling to call it 'genocide'. Well, today



we have another struggle, people are struggling to call it ‘Genocide against the Tutsi’. But the problem of definitions started way back in 1994, of just simply naming what it was.

Somebody — I think a journalist — asked: “Do you call it genocide?” They said no, it may be acts of genocide. Then the journalist asked: “How many acts of genocide does it take to call it genocide?” Do you remember that story? So it is surprising that we still have the same discussion 27 years later. It’s amazing.

Meanwhile, specialists and human rights groups remain silent about the obvious dangers, reluctant to say anything that might be seen to vindicate the Rwandan government.

The cynicism and hypocrisy reflected in such bigoted narratives is breath-taking. And on our African continent, Rwanda is hardly the only target of these tactics. It is something we do not deserve, and will not accept.

Recently, a commission of historians appointed by the French government released a detailed report after reading official archives that had remained secret.

The report shows that President Mitterrand and his closest advisers knew that a genocide against Tutsi was being planned by their allies in Rwanda. Despite that knowledge, the president decided to continue supporting them, because he believed this was necessary for France’s geopolitical position. Rwandan lives were just pawns in geopolitical games.



We welcome this report because it marks an important step toward a common understanding of what took place. It also marks a change, it shows the desire, even for leaders in France, to move forward with a good understanding of what happened, and we welcome this. We welcome this. We are going to have the report presented to us; I have been informed about it. It is a good thing.

Rwanda will also have a word to say in the near future, maybe around the third week of this month. The findings we have in our hands, based on the work that has been done by people who were commissioned to do that in parallel to what was being done in France — the findings go in the same direction. The important thing is to continue working together to document the truth. This is the truth.

The decades-long effort by certain French officials to cover up their responsibilities has caused significant damage.

History was falsified by promoting the lie of the so-called double genocide, including with the Mapping Report. Fraudulent court cases were launched in Europe against our officers and officials. Genocide suspects were granted safe haven, and Rwanda's extradition requests refused.

And this was not just in France; it's just because I was talking about the report. Even in other capitals of those developed countries, we know of cases that have gone on for close to 15 years. There are places where there are about 4-5 genocide suspects, the files are very clear. We talked to the country hosting them, we begged them.



We said, the case files are ready, they are here, can you please give them to us for trial?

The answer was no, we have no extradition treaty, we don't trust your courts, we don't trust your laws. Okay, we said fine. We needed your trust, but you don't want to give it to us. Fine. So can you try them in your courts? Because if you have a problem with our courts, you don't have problems with your own courts. And even after that request, they still have excuses for not acting. And it continues, and goes on and goes on.

At the same time, these are the people who have all kinds of blame to level against us. We say, but why don't you do it? Are you not ashamed of protecting genocide suspects, covering up for them for any reason? You don't want me to try them, so why don't you try them? It's the same people who question the use of 'Genocide against Tutsi'.

And by the way, I think the word genocide, we are not the ones who invented it. This word was coined by some other people long ago, long before our own tragic situation. But somebody says, you know, we don't want to accept 'Genocide against the Tutsi' because peacekeepers died, foreigners died, Hutus died, everybody was killed.

Look, even if you thought those were the facts, how does this stop you from isolating this case and treating it the way it should be treated? And then you can come up with your own list of other



cases to deal with. I don't doubt these people's capacity or logic or anything. No, it's something else.

It's like saying, let's not try this guy for the crimes he committed. Let's deal with how he got to this court. So we have a long way to go.

So when these genocide suspects are granted safe haven and extradition requests are refused, it has a direct consequence, and we have seen a massive increase in genocide denial and revisionism, which will take years to reverse.

Well-known publishers release books accusing the RPF itself of having masterminded the genocide in order to take power. What is even more disturbing, is that too many people who know better prefer to stay out of it by keeping quiet.

A few years ago, a country, I remember, issued a statement to mark the commemoration of the Genocide. On this day we can get a statement of solidarity, or not. If you don't want to send us a statement of solidarity, we don't complain, really we won't complain. But a country sent us a statement of solidarity, supposedly, but then there were more chapters about human rights violations and governance, in the same solidarity message.

So I took time and wrote a back and just made one simple request. I said, you know, this day, the 7th of April, is a commemoration day. And it's just one day in the 365 days of the year. Just one.



So I asked them, can't you spare us just this one day? And for the remaining number of days, 364, you can write anything you want. You can abuse us, insult us anyway you want for the rest the year. But spare us this one.

Fortunately I think they got the message, it hasn't happened again, but there are others who don't learn and maybe their statements are on the way saying the same things. But we really have space to accommodate that as well.

And yet, despite a unanimous resolution by the United Nations General Assembly, there are still one or two countries which stubbornly refuse to use the phrase 'Genocide against the Tutsi'. In the whole of the General Assembly they have that understanding, except one or two, just as they resisted using the word 'genocide' in 1994, as I told you, until it was too late.

They came back to the word itself. Some people had a problem if they called it genocide, as it puts a heavy burden on them to act, to stop it. So they were really trying to avoid the heavy burden of stopping it by refusing to call it genocide.

It is interesting how history repeats itself. We have almost gone full circle from 1994 to now. We have a repetition of questioning words and definitions and all kinds of things.

It is as though this simple recognition of what the word should be would be a reward bestowed on Rwandans in exchange for 'good behaviour'. In their view, you behave in the way they want you to



behave, then they will give you a gift, a reward of recognising what it is. What a shame. But we cannot respond to blackmail on such matters of principle.

Unfortunately, a new generation of Rwandans in the diaspora — and this is really a small group — who have no personal responsibility for what happened in 1994, draw on these accounts to repackage genocide ideology as a critique of governance and human rights. And they are picking it from there or being supported by that.

For us in Rwanda, we are not being held back. We move forward. There is no difference so big that a hand extended in good faith will not be reciprocated. That is how we Rwandans are, who our history has made us.

But the currency of forgiveness is truth. We cannot get tired of talking about the realities we have lived.

On this most solemn of days, I wish to close by thanking Rwandans for remaining dedicated to the task of unity and reconciliation. We also thank the many friends around the world who have joined with us over the years.

Not only that, while some people were having problems of calling it genocide at the United Nations — among those having problems at the time was even the Secretary-General of the United Nations — you know some amazing countries and their representatives stood up and stood out, and said no. This is what it is.



And one of them is an African country that we shall always be proud to call a good friend, represented by a man I remember, called Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria. Nigeria stood out and said no. There is a problem and we must call it what it is. Professor Gambari was there, and we shall always be proud of Nigeria.

Then there was the Czech Republic, there was New Zealand. Countries you wouldn't think about first. There is a tendency to always think about these big countries. But we will always be indebted and thankful to some of these people across the world.

Let me end by telling you something I remember, and I will end from that. When we were still young and going to primary school, I remember being told a story of the lion and the sheep.

There was a stream of water, like a river. The lion was upstream drinking water. Downstream, there was a sheep drinking water as well. So when the lion recognised there was a sheep nearby, he looked for a quick excuse to go to the sheep and have it for a meal.

But first they had a conversation. The lion called to the sheep and said: "Hey you, you see I'm here drinking water and you're just here making it dirty."

The sheep humbly said, "But sir, I am downstream. Where I am drinking the water from, even if I was making it dirty, it is not coming to you."



So the lion got angry and felt provoked. “How dare you answer back to me like that? You are even abusing me.” The sheep said, “I’m really sorry, I didn’t want to abuse you, forgive me.”

And the lion said, “You know, even the other day, actually you abused me.” Then the sheep said, “It’s the first time I have come to drink water from here, so it’s not me.” And the lion said, “You see, you are really annoying me. Even if it is not you, it was your brother or your sister who was here.”

“No sir,” said the sheep, “I am not aware of my sister or brother who came here. I have come from so far away for the first time.” So the lion of course went for the sheep.

I am telling you this story because sometimes we are treated like this story suggests. Somebody out there saying, “Hey you, you are even abusing me.” Even when you have not talked to them. “If it is not you, it is your brother, your mother, your sister.” “No, sir.”

I think some people have been doing that to us.

But let me tell you, don’t ever accept to be sheep.

I don’t even aspire to be this kind of lion. I’m going to be happy being who I am that will challenge this lion.

Thank you very much.