

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Valentine Rugwabiza
Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Member of Cabinet of the
Government of Rwanda

At the 23rd Commemoration of the Genocide
Against the Tutsi

United Nations Headquarters

Please check against delivery

New York, 07 April 2017

Your Excellency Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations;

Your Excellency Vice President of the United Nations General Assembly,

Excellencies, Permanent Representatives to the UN;

Dear Survivors, compatriots and friends of Rwanda;

1. On behalf of the people and the Government of Rwanda, I want to thank you all for joining us at this 23rd Commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Your presence means a lot to Rwanda. It is a mark of your respect for the dignity of the victims and the resilience of the survivors. I take this opportunity to thank the Department of Public Information for their cooperation in organising this annual commemoration.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

2. The purpose of the annual commemoration at the United Nations is to continue to raise awareness of the international community about our collective responsibility to prevent Genocide from happening anywhere in the world. We do so by honouring the memory of the victims; by renewing our resolve to fight the Genocide ideology and by sharing with the world what we have done in Rwanda to make “Never Again” a reality.
3. The annual commemoration also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on lessons learnt since the failure of the international community to prevent and stop the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The theme for this year’s commemoration; “Remember the Genocide against the Tutsi - Fight Genocide Ideology - Build on Our Progress,” reminds us that the Genocide against the Tutsi was the result of a well organised plan and ideology to exterminate all Tutsi. It also reminds us that the ideology didn’t stop with the end of the Genocide. Indeed, the denial, alteration and distortion of the facts of Genocide are all well-known and documented mechanisms used by Genocide ideologues.

4. One of the mechanisms used by Genocide deniers is the use of deliberately confusing language. Whenever we refer to the Genocide against the Tutsi, historical clarity and the use of correct words are of critical importance.

What we commemorate today is neither the Rwanda Genocide nor the 1994 Genocide. It is the Genocide against the Tutsi. Any other reference is inaccurate, misleading and wrong.

Let us remember that the former International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda established by this very body concluded in its judgement on 2nd September, 1998 that; "Genocide was, indeed, committed in Rwanda against the Tutsi as a group."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. We all know that the Genocide against the Tutsi was not inevitable yet it happened. The question to reflect on today is "Why?" Why those who had the responsibility and capability to prevent or stop it didn't act? Why those in positions of influence and authority at the time, made the wrong decisions? Many elaborated explanations have been suggested to explain the failure of the international community to act and stop the Genocide against the Tutsi. The truth is much simpler; those who were invested by the Charter of the United Nations with the duty and responsibility to prevent and stop the Genocide against the Tutsi did not consider that the lives of those targeted mattered sufficiently to warrant their protection. If faced with a similar situation today, will they act differently? We can only hope so; and it is this hope that lessons have been learnt from our tragic History that informs our annual commemoration at the United Nations.

6. We pay special tribute to the Ghanaian contingent of peacekeepers in Rwanda in 1994 and to the late Captain Mbaye Diagne from Senegal. These fellow Africans refused the orders of the then UN leadership in New York to evacuate with the rest of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda and thus to abandon the victims to their fate. To them, the lives of those targeted mattered. These gallant sons and daughters of Africa demonstrated courage, empathy and a sense of responsibility that many others lacked.

7. In Rwanda, we have learned hard lessons from our tragic history. We have learned that Genocide ideology thrives where its manifestations and expressions are tolerated. We have learned that hatred knows no borders. It is a poison that

spreads where human rights violations are widespread with no accountability.

8. We also learnt that the most effective defense against Genocide ideology is our cohesion as a people and it is this lesson that informed our choices for unity, reconciliation and a governance system centered on the wellbeing and dignity of all Rwandans.
9. Rwanda today offers a story of hope; how a country and its people can stand strong in the face of adversity and together build a new and united nation. Through investing in our people and building institutions, we have delivered peace, security, opportunity and, more importantly, dignity for all Rwandans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Let me conclude by thanking all of you again for your presence at the 23rd Commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi. I thank in particular the survivors. Your strength and resilience remains a source of inspiration.
11. We also remain forever indebted to the Rwanda Defense Forces – men and women who, under the command of His Excellency President Paul Kagame, single handedly stopped the Genocide against the Tutsis in July 1994. Without them, there wouldn't be survivors like Sonia to tell their story.

I thank you.